Part One and Part Two of theThesis:

The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s): The Development of Contemporary Curatorial Discourse in Europe and North America since 1987

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THESIS CONTAINS

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Table of Contents

CHAPTER THREE: Curating as a Medium: the Convergence of Art and Curatorial Practice Since the 1990s

PART TWO: PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH

Curating as Research Practice; Research as Curatorial Practice: Four Curated Exhibitions with Three Principal Categories of Organisation: The *Background*, The *Middle-Ground* and The *Foreground*

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The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s): The Development of Contemporary Curatorial Discourse in Europe and North America since 1987

ABSTRACT

Centred on the development of discussions around independent curatorial practice from 1987 to 2007 – a time of expanded understanding of the role of the curator – this dissertation illustrates how curatorial discourse has generated a significant body of knowledge within contemporary art discourses.

This research has both theoretical and practical outcomes, represented within a dissertation that is divided into three parts:

1. An historical survey of key developments within curatorial practice and discourse, forming the main body of text in three chapters.
2. Four exhibition projects realised and analysed alongside this research (with Power Point presentation submitted as Appendix Two).
3. Forty-four original interviews with leading curators, artist-curators, exhibition historians, critic-curators, graduates from curatorial training programmes and leaders of these courses working between 1987 and 2007 (Appendix One).

1. Chapter One reveals how, with the first appearance of independent exhibition-makers, 'demystification' of the curatorial position offered a critique of artistic autonomy in the late 1960s. It illustrates how curating became a form of self-presentation with the 'curator-as-auteur' in the late 1980s, and how the 'super-visibility' of a new generation of curators took place in the mid-to-late 1990s when curatorial debates and published anthologies began to appear as a way of correcting gaps in historical curatorial knowledge. Chapter Two traces the globalisation of curating in the context of biennials and large-scale international exhibitions from 1989 to 2006. It considers how, since 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in 1989, curators have embraced globalism, transculturalism and a move towards collective models of curating. Chapter Three expands on the concept of the 'curator-as-artist' and reveals a convergence of artistic and curatorial practice in the 1990s, which provides a theoretical backdrop to the practical component of this research project.

2. Employing a curatorial strategy of dividing an exhibition into three spatial categories – the background, the middle-ground and the foreground – four related exhibitions were realised as practical examples of how differences between collaborative and authorial structures converge in processes of co-production. These exhibitions reflect upon the dominant issues of the theoretical research in order to practically demonstrate how the group exhibition is based on organisational structures that are the results of co-operation between artists and the curator(s), leading to co-authored exhibition formations.

3. Interviews represent the methodological approach employed as the main means of gathering knowledge and provide the primary basis of the analysis of key issues emerging during this period. They not only establish an historical trajectory for curatorial practice but also allow identification of key moments of historical conjuncture within the field.

Through an examination of interview transcripts alongside literature published between 1987 and 2007 and the four inter-connected exhibitions, this research re-evaluates the relationship between artist(s) and curator(s) by demonstrating how the group exhibition form has become a creative medium of communication in and of itself.

The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s): The Development of Contemporary Curatorial Discourse in Europe and North America since 1987

INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is essentially a study of how the group exhibition[1] has, since 1987, become the dominant model of contemporary curatorial practice. It seeks to analyse how group exhibitions and their accompanying critiques and debates have informed the understanding of art and artistic practice over the past twenty years. More specifically, it aims to demonstrate how those involved in the framing of art and the ideas around it have contributed to the transformation of art and its exhibition context. Like any medium[2] of communication, curating is a method of conveying ideas – about art and its production – in which those involved in the process determine the ways in which those ideas and the field of cultural production are experienced and discussed. By focusing on those curators who have considered the group exhibition as a creative model of knowledge production, this dissertation aims to examine how, through the bringing-together of multiple artistic positions, curatorial practice has altered the way in which art is mediated to an audience. In doing so, this serves as an overview of the many ways in which the perception of art has been transformed by curatorial practice during a period in which discussions increasingly took place with relation to the specific field of contemporary art curating.

This research has a dual purpose in a project with both theoretical and practical outcomes. In order to show how curatorial discussions have displayed a tendency to prioritise group exhibitions, and those responsible for them, as the main object and subject of curatorial discourses,[3] it has been necessary to produce a substantial personal archive of relevant

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[1] I will use the term 'exhibition' throughout this paper to imply a temporary space for public presentation within which an overarching curatorial framework is provided as a means of bringing together a number of artists, with the curator as agent responsible for the selection of these artists and/or their works, i.e. the group or collective exhibition as opposed to a solo, monographic or survey exhibition of the work of an individual artist.

[2] The term 'medium' is defined, discussed and analysed in detail in Chapter Three of the main body of text.

[3] I employ the term 'discourse' as 'the study of *any* aspect of language use' within the specific field of art and curating. See Fasold, Ralph W. *The Sociolinguistics of Language (Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Vol. 2)*, (Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1990), p. 65. See also *The Discourse Reader*, Eds. Nikolas Coupland and Adam Jaworski (London and New York, Routledge, 1999). This thesis is also a study of 'the constructive and dynamic role of either spoken or written discourse [in] structuring areas of knowledge and the social and institutional practices which are associated with' contemporary art and curating. See Candlin, Christopher N. 'General Editor's Preface', *The Construction of Professional Discourse*, Eds. Britt-Louise Gunnarsson, Per Linell and Bengt Nordberg (London, Longman, 1997), p.ix. As Jürgen Habermas states: 'Discourses take place in particular social contexts and are subject to the limitations of time and space.' For Habermas, participants in any discourse are always 'real human beings driven by other motives in addition to the one permitted motive of the search for truth. Topics and contributions have

documents, catalogues and publications published in the past two decades. This research project is an attempt to comprehend how curating has developed as a self-motivated, individual creative activity over the past twenty years. By undertaking a survey of literature and related discourse, it is my intention to contribute to an understanding of the dominant issues that have emerged in relation to curatorial practice. In response to the evident gaps in curatorial knowledge that revealed themselves during this process, it became necessary to undertake interviews with curators working independent of museum or fixed institutional posts, who have realised group exhibitions since the late 1960s. In this way, a sizeable quantity of new material was collated in the form of original recorded interviews.

Constructing a level of understanding around exhibition-making – by studying exhibition literature and conducting first-hand interviews – also provides a way of investigating my own curatorial practice and led to the production of four exhibition projects between 2003 and 2006. The purpose of the archive described above, therefore, has been to assist in the analysis of curatorial practice over the past twenty years, through the identification of an historical trajectory, while providing considerable background knowledge for the curatorial projects that were developed alongside this historical and theoretical research. The production of an Appendix of primary interviews is central to this study – producing new evidence in support of my analysis – as are the four exhibition projects realised in conjunction with this research.

While taking into account the evolution of curatorial discourse since the late 1960s in order to provide the necessary background to the research area, this study is centred on the key changes in contemporary art curating from 1987 through to the present. There are a number of reasons for taking this as a starting point for detailed study. Firstly, 1987 was the year that the French arts centre, Le Magasin in Grenoble, launched the first postgraduate curatorial training programme in Europe, called 'l'École du Magasin Curatorial Training Program'.[4] Secondly, it was in 1987 that the Art History/Museum

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to be organised.' The organisation of individual contributions often involves the arrangement and controlling of the opening, adjournment and resumption of discussion, which must be ordered in such a way as to 'sufficiently neutralise empirical limitations' and any avoidable 'internal and external interference' so that the idealised conditions are 'always already presupposed by participants in argumentation [that] can at least be approximated.' Habermas, Jürgen. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*, Trans. Christian Lenhardt and Shierry Weber Nicholsen, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1990), p. 92.

[4] For a chronology of the final year exhibitions at Le Magasin between 1987 and 2006, see *Le Magasin 1986-2006*, Ed. Yves Aupetitallot (Grenoble and Zurich, Le Magasin and JRP Ringier, 2006), pp. 193-244.

Studies element of the Whitney Independent Study Program (ISP)[5] was renamed 'Curatorial and Critical Studies', with theoretician Hal Foster appointed senior instructor on the basis that 'exhibitions should embody theoretical and critical arguments', with 'the ISP as a chance to experiment and see if it was possible to develop alternative curatorial forms, to challenge the established conventions.'[6] Each of the eight-to-nine-month programmes, at Le Magasin and the Whitney ISP – which served as templates for numerous similar programmes throughout Europe and North America[7] – have as their

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[5] Founded in 1968, the other option being the Studio Program. Every year since 1987, around ten students have been selected for the 'Curatorial and Critical Studies Program', half of which are admitted under the curatorial strand. For a review of the Whitney ISP's history, see Singerman, Howard. 'In Theory & Practice: A History of the Whitney Independent Study Program', *Artforum*, Vol. XLII, No. 10, (February, 2004, pp. 112-117.

[6] Ron Clark cited in Gutterman, Scott. 'A Brief History of ISP', *Independent Study Program: 25 Years*, Ed. Scott Gutterman (New York, Whitney Museum of American Art, 1993), p. 25. This publication also provides a chronology of the ISP between 1968 and 1993, with a list of the alumni graduating during this period.

[7] For a list of some of the main curatorial training programmes see www.curatorialeducationnetwork.com (accessed 21/04/07). Curatorial Training Programmes that have begun in Europe and North America since the early 1990s include significantly:

MA in Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art and Design (RCA), London (established 1992). For an account of the foundation of this programme and the influence of the Whitney ISP and Le Magasin, see Gleadowe, Teresa. Interview with the author. London, 25/03/05, pp. 2-4. Appendix One: GL. In 1994, five students graduated from the MA in Curating Contemporary Art at the RCA, which is a two year course with Masters certification. Since 1999, twelve to thirteen students have graduated from the RCA each year, see exhibition catalogues from the MA course from 1994-2007: *Remote Control*, Eds. MA Curating Students (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1994); *Acting Out: The Body in Video: Then and Now*, Eds. Julia Bunnage et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1994); *Make Believe*, Eds. Claire Doherty et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1995); *Cabin Fever*, Eds. MA Curating Students (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1996); *You are Here: Resiting Installations*, Eds. MA Curating Students (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1997); *The Campaign Against Living Miserably*, Eds. MA Curating Students (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1998); *From A to B (And Back Again)*, Eds. Stephen Buchanan et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 1999); *democracy*, Eds. Mark Beasley et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2000); *Playing Amongst the Ruins*, Eds. Paul Barratt et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design 2001); *Fair*, Eds. Claire Barrett et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2002); *The Straight or Crooked Way*, Eds. Max Andrews et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2003); *This Much is Certain*, Eds. Kitty Anderson et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2004); *Do Not Interrupt Your Activities*, Eds. Alejandra Aguodo et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2005); *Again for Tomorrow*, Eds. Andrew Bonachini et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2006); *Various Small Fires*, Eds. Giorgio Agostini et al. (London, Royal College of Art and Design, 2007).

De Appel Curatorial Training Programme, Amsterdam (1994). Since De Appel began its Curatorial Training Programme in 1994, six students have been taken on each year for an eight month programme; for a list of participants and their final exhibitions, see *If Walls Had Years: A Survey of Activities and Exhibitions De Appel 1984-2005*, Ed. Edna Van Duyn (Amsterdam, De Appel, 2005), pp. 298-703.

Centre for Curatorial Studies and Art in Contemporary Culture, Bard College of Art and Design, New York (1994).

MA in Creative Curating at Goldsmith's College, London (1995, now called MFA Curating). From September 2006 to June 2007, I was employed as Visiting Tutor on the MFA Curating at Goldsmith's College, University of London. During this year, twenty-seven students were enrolled on the first year of its two-year programme.

Konstfack CuratorLab, Stockholm (2000).

MA in Curatorial Practice at California College of the Arts, San Francisco.

In 2007, new MA Curatorial programmes in the UK were launched at the University of West of England and Falmouth College of Art and Design. See Walker, T. 'Exhibiting an Eye for the Contemporary', *The Independent*, 18 May, 2006.

As part of the background research to this dissertation, a study of these programmes was carried out, with particular attention being paid to the final year exhibitions they generate. To expand upon this research in the detail it perhaps

main outcome the production of a group exhibition which each year's intake of students work upon together from initial proposal to final installation. So, 1987 represents a significant departure in the learning of curatorship, from vocational work with collections in museum or institutional contexts, to an understanding of curating as a potentially independent, critically-engaged and experimental form of exhibition-making practice. At this time, the practice of curating became a possible area of academic study, as much as a professional career choice. Finally, from a personal perspective, 1987 marks the year that I began my own studies as a full-time Fine Art undergraduate and is, therefore, representative of the beginning of my own academic, artistic and professional career as an artist-curator.

I. Methodology: Literature Review

This analysis is centred on, but not limited to, an extensive and disparate body of texts from 1987 to 2007. This has included: existing historical literature from within the field of contemporary art and museum display; anthologies of writing on curatorial practice; essays from exhibition catalogues; discussions around curating published by contemporary art magazines and journals; conference papers; symposia notes; published interviews with contemporary curators and, where possible, it has also included visits to the curated exhibitions under discussion. This research aims to question why, prior to the 1990s, very few historical assessments of curating and curatorial paradigms existed, let alone a discourse specific to contemporary curatorial practice. This omission was identified by Mary Anne Staniszewski when she proposed that Western art history had forgotten to take into account the functions performed by curating, exhibition design and the spatial arrangement of exhibition-forms.[8] I aim to show how it was in this epistemic void that curatorial discourse began to take shape in the 1990s, and a generation of curators emerged during what Michael Brenson has called 'the curator's moment'.[9]

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merits would have detracted from the production of a curator-focused archive of documentation and interviews centred on selected individuals and their creative output. Having said this, a key question pertaining to the impact of such programmes has been retained within all of my interviews. I interviewed many curators, artists and critics who either graduated from these programmes or have been responsible for their initiation and content during the past twenty years; the relevance of such courses was questioned throughout the research process.

[8] Staniszewski, Mary Anne. *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998), p. xxi.

[9] Brenson, Michael. 'The Curator's Moment – Trends in the Field of International Contemporary Art Exhibitions', *Art Journal*, 57:4, (Winter, 1998), p. 16.

II. Methodology: Interviews (Part Three: Appendix One)

Alongside the review of secondary source material detailed above, primary research was undertaken in two main ways. During the four year research period, fifty-seven interviews were conducted with leading curators, exhibition historians, artist-curators, critic-curators, graduates from curatorial training programmes and lecturers and course leaders from these programmes.[10] All of the interviews were recorded face-to-face, often within the

[10] All interviews were recorded using a mini disc recorder. The full fifty-seven interviews are listed here, including those that were not transcribed. They are divided into four groups, listed alphabetically within each of these groupings, together with brief credentials for each interviewee.

1. Current Curatorial Training Programme Directors in Europe and North America: Saskia Bos (curator since the 1980s, founding director of De Appel Foundation and De Appel Curatorial Training Programme, Amsterdam, in 1994); Eva Diaz (independent curator, graduated from the Whitney ISP in the 1990s, currently head of the curatorial strand at the Whitney ISP, New York); Teresa Gleadowe (Founding Course Director of the MA Visual Arts Administration: Curating and Commissioning Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art and Design, London, in 1992); Anna Harding (independent curator, founder of the MA in Creative Curating at Goldsmith's College, University of London, in 1995); Andrew Renton (independent curator since the 1990s, current Director of MFA Curating Programme, Goldsmith's College, University of London); Alice Vergara-Bastiand (current Head of Cultural Department, Le Magasin, and co-ordinator of L'École du Magasin – also recorded was a discussion between Alice Vergara-Bastiand and graduates from L'École du Magasin in 2005, Heather Anderson, Jérôme Grand and Julia Maier; both these interviews remain untranscribed).

2. Curators/Artist-Curators based in the UK: Shumon Basar (curator since 2000, currently Director of Curatorial Practice and Cultural Projects at the Architecture Association, London – interview untranscribed); Iwona Blazwick (curator since early 1990s, currently Artistic Director of Whitechapel Art Gallery, London); Neil Cummings (artist and independent curator, London, since mid-1990s – interview untranscribed); Liam Gillick (artist and curator since the early 1990s, based in London and New York); Jens Hoffmann (curator since the late 1990s, currently Director of the CCA Wattis Institute of Art, California College for the Arts, San Francisco); Lynda Morris (curator since the 1970s, Founding Director of Norwich Gallery); Michael Petry (artist and curator since the 1990s, currently runs the Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), Peckham, London); Polly Staple (curator since the 1990s, currently independent curator based in London, previous post as Curator of Frieze Project and Talks Programme 2003-2006); Gavin Wade (artist-curator based in Birmingham); Jeannine Richards (co-founder of artists' group Artlab and curator since the late 1990s, currently based in London – interview untranscribed).

3. Curators/Artists based in Europe: Nicolas Bourriaud (curator and critic since the early 1990s, Founding Co-Director of Palais du Tokyo, Paris); Ami Barak (curator since the 1980s, currently based in Paris); Thomas Boutoux (critic and curator based in Paris); Catherine David (independent curator, Artistic Director of Document X in 1997); Ann Demeester (curator since the late 1990s, current Director of De Appel Foundation, Amsterdam); Barnaby Drabble (independent curator since the 1990s, graduate of Goldsmith's MA in Creative Curating in 1998); Annie Fletcher (independent curator since the late 1990s, currently course leader on the Curatorial Training Programme, De Appel, Amsterdam); Hou Hanru (curator since the 1990s); Pierre Léguillon (artist and curator since the 1990s, currently based in Paris – interview untranscribed); Maria Lind (curator since the 1990s, currently Director of IASPIS, Stockholm); Ute Meta Bauer (artist and independent curator since the late 1980s, Artistic Director of Berlin Biennale, 2004 and part of the curatorial think-tank for Documenta11, 2002); Stéphanie Moisdon-Trembley (independent curator since the late 1990s, currently based in Paris); Hans Ulrich Obrist (curator since the early 1990s, currently Co-Director of Exhibitions and Programmes at Serpentine Gallery, London); Sarah Pierce (artist-curator, currently based in Dublin, studied at the Whitney ISP in the late 1990s); Jérôme Sans (curator since the 1990s, currently Director of the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art, Gateshead); Nicolaus Schafhausen (curator since the early 1990s, currently Director of Witte de With, Rotterdam); Eric Troncy (curator since the 1990s, co-curator of the Lyon Biennale, 2003 and co-editor of *Frog* magazine); Alexis Vaillant (independent curator since 2002, currently based in Paris – interview untranscribed).

4. Curators/Artists based in North America: Carlos Basualdo (curator since the late 1990s, studied on the Critical Studies Program at Whitney ISP in 1994, currently Curator of Contemporary Art at Philadelphia Museum of Art); AA Bronson (artist and curator, member of General Idea 1968-94, currently Director of Printed Matter, New York); Dan Cameron (curator since the late 1980s, currently independent curator, based in New York); Lynne Cooke (curator since the early 1990s, currently Curator at Dia Center for the Arts, New York); Okwui Enwezor (curator since the late 1980s, Artistic Director of Documenta11, currently Director of Academic Affairs at San Francisco Art Institute); Tom Finkelpearl (curator since the 1980s, currently Director of the Queens Museum, New York – interview untranscribed); Andrea Fraser (artist and curator since the early 1980s, participant on the Studio Program at Whitney ISP in 1983); Rainer Ganahl (artist and curator since the early 1990s, participant on the Studio Program, Whitney ISP, in 1990 – interview untranscribed); Lia Gangatano (curator since the late 1990s, currently Director of Participant Inc., New York);

interviewees' homes or working spaces, offering parallel access to their archives and to material that was otherwise difficult to locate. Following the recording and replaying of these audio files, forty-four of the most relevant were selected and transcribed as individual text files. These interviews will be cited throughout this dissertation and are submitted here as individual documents for examination (Appendix One), collated in alphabetical order with the date and place of the initial interview noted in the index. Recorded within the same broad timeframe (2003-2006) and reflecting upon themes relevant to the main research interests, these interviews were employed as a research tool, as a means of gathering knowledge about subjects and of producing a comparative study of individual statements in relation to the dominant issues of the subject area.

While the first interviews adopted a semi-structured form, tending to be more improvised than those conducted later, certain issues began to emerge. Each began by trying to trace the subject's origins as a curator, their background, influences and thinking behind some of their exhibitions and/or previously-published curatorial statements. They gradually became more structured around key transformations within curatorial practice such as: historical amnesia (with relation to curatorial innovations of the past and a lack of knowledge on contemporary curatorial practice); the demystification of the curatorial role since the late 1960s towards a position of super-visibility for a number of curators practising in the 1990s; the dominance of the group exhibition as the main medium discussed in relation to contemporary curators; the conflation of curatorial and artistic practice since the late 1960s; the influence of biennial exhibitions proliferating in the 1990s (on discourses around globalism and internationalised curatorial practice); the professionalisation of curating and the influence (upon curatorial

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Matthew Higgs (curator since early 1990s, currently Director and Curator at White Columns, New York); Jeannette Ingelman and Papa Colo (curators since the late 1970s, currently Co-Directors of EXIT Arts, New York); John Kelsey (artist and curator since the late 1990s, member of the artists' group The Bernadette Corporation and co-founder of Reena Spaulding's Fine Arts, New York); John Miller (artist, curator and critic with *Artforum* and *Texte zur Kunst* since the early 1980s, participant on Studio Program, Whitney ISP, in 1977); Robert Nickas (began curating in the 1980s, currently based in New York as an independent curator and critic for *Artforum*); Brian O'Doherty (artist and critic); Steven Rand (curator since the 1990s, founding director of Apexart, New York); Seth Siegelaub (curator of numerous key exhibitions of Conceptual Art in the late 1960s in New York, moved to Europe in 1973 when he stopped working as a curator); Mary Anne Staniszewski (art historician who began curating during the 1980s); Robert Storr (Curator at MoMA, New York, until 2005, now an independent curator based in New York and currently Artistic Director of the Venice Biennale, 2007); Brian Wallis (began curating in the late 1980s, currently Curator at International Centre for Photography, New York); Lawrence Weiner (artist involved in many key exhibitions from the sixties onwards); Catherine de Zegher (began curating in the late 1980s, ex-Director of The Drawing Center, New York).

With such an extensive research project, not all of the interviews carried out have been referred to or cited within the main text, representing an inevitable surplus of material. Those interviews that were less relevant to this research may yet be useful within a field which has gained momentum since this thesis was begun in 2003, and will become a resource for future students, curators and researchers within the field.

knowledge production) of curatorial training programmes since 1987 and the impact of curatorial anthologies from the 1990s on the production of discourses particular to the field.[11]

Each interview, in part, corresponds with what Michel Foucault called a 'statement', which belongs to a 'discursive formation' in the way a sentence belongs to a text and as a proposition to a 'deductive whole'. Each statement is an 'atom of discourse', an 'elementary unit of discourse' that makes up only one part of 'a discursive formation', where 'discourse' is a group of statements in as far as they belong to the same 'discursive formation'.[12] Although statements, interviews and recorded conversations with many of these subjects are widely available, they are rarely in-depth and tend to be generalised, curt and populist, which has much to do with their published format in magazines, journals and catalogues. Consistent with the intention to elaborate upon the curatorial thinking, the interview format facilitated the gathering of information about particular exhibitions, publications and events, generating first-hand responses to key issues in areas where little criticality had been published.[13]

While interviews with artists have a long-established history – becoming a principal communicative form in the 1960s, in particular linked to Pop Art, Conceptual Art and Minimalism[14] – compiling research through recorded interviews with curators and placing considerable weight upon these accounts is to imply a paradigm shift away from the primacy of the artist towards the figure of the curator. Much of this material must be treated with attention to what W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley called 'intentional fallacy', whereby each interviewee has the potential to inscribe their own narrative with a degree of 'contextual evidence' to support their own version of past events, particularly when the only permanent manifestation of the exhibition projects under discussion exists in documentation, catalogues and reviews.[15] While a degree of scepticism towards the interview material has been

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[11] See Appendix One for the specific interview questions.

[12] Foucault, Michel. *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (London and New York, Routledge, 2003 [originally published in English in 1972]), p. 90. See also pp. 90-131.

[13] See Diers, Michael. 'Infinite Conversation', the introduction to Hans Ulrich Obrist *Interviews: Volume I*, Ed. Thomas Boutoux (Milan, Charta, 2003).

[14] See Lawrence Alloway, 'Network: The Art World described as a system,' *Artforum*, XI, No.1, (December 1972), p. 31.

[15] In Monroe Beardsley and W.K Wimsott's 'Intentional Fallacy,' *Sewanee Review* (Vol. 54, 1946), pp. 468-488, the authors argue that the meaning of a literary work does not lie with the author's intention. Instead they suggest that the critical interpretation of a text can be divided into three categories of evidence: 'Internal Evidence' as that which is present in the content and form of the work as a matter of fact; 'External Evidence' as that which is external to the work such as statements made in other publications about the work; and 'Contextual Evidence' as that which concerns the meaning derived from the particular work's relationship to other works by the same author.

maintained throughout the research process, the technique of the audio interview as a method of gathering evidential historical accounts is considered to have its own inherent merit – within scholarly approaches to recent art history, social science and cultural studies – as a vehicle for understanding cultural events, times, exhibitions and places that cannot be experienced again or effectively documented otherwise.

The recorded interviews provide the foundation to this project and have been referred to throughout as primary source material. To a large extent, the views expressed therein have directed the ongoing process of gathering relevant documents and determining a bibliography which, in turn, dictated the selection of further interview subjects. The interviewees are international, trans-cultural and cross-generational and, while a number of historical figures from within the field – such as curator Seth Siegelaub or artists Brian O'Doherty and Lawrence Weiner – have been interviewed about their involvement in key projects from the late 1960s, the principal focus has been on those individuals who have realised curatorial projects in Europe and/or North America since 1987. Each interview subject has played an active part in both contextualising and contributing to the institutionalisation and expansion of contemporary curatorial practice during this time and may be considered as having primarily:

1) realised curatorial projects exterior to a fixed museum position which would limit curatorial responsibility to a collection.
2) participated in discussions around curating through symposia, conferences and curatorial publications and, with their writings/statements, articulated an individual position.
3) conveyed a viewpoint through their numerous projects and articulations, which has proceeded towards what is a clearly-demarcated, individual, curatorial practice.

Although each interview tended to look at the specific exhibitions or statements made by the interviewee, for the sake of easy comparison certain leading questions[16] were asked in every interview, thus placing an emphasis upon questions related to the three emergent themes of the research as expanded in the chapters described here.

[16] For a full list of these questions see each interview transcript as submitted in Appendix One.

III. Part One: The Body of Text

The central written component of this dissertation is divided into three chapters, which attempt to trace the development of a discourse specific to the field of contemporary curatorial practice since the late 1960s. By studying published curatorial texts and undertaking interviews with curators, this research examines how art has been produced, disseminated and mediated during a period in which the group exhibition became the dominant model of curatorial practice. Analysing the changes that took place during this period, an attempt is made to demonstrate that concepts such as selecting, organising, arranging, mediating and promoting have intersected with the spaces of display, exhibition, production and curating during the past twenty years.[17] The evolution of issues within the chapters may be summarised as follows:

Chapter One aims to trace the main discursive trends to have emerged within curatorial discourse during the period under consideration, mapping a burgeoning understanding of curating as a creative form of exhibition production and mediation. Beginning with a consideration of the 1960s – specifically in relation to projects by curators Seth Siegelaub, Lucy Lippard and Harald Szeemann – this chapter seeks to identify transitional moments in the advent of independent curatorship, as an activity beyond fixed institutional posts. In doing so, attention will be paid to the process of 'demystification' – advocated on behalf of exhibition-makers, mediators and artists – which played a crucial part in exposing the more hidden aspects of cultural decision-making and artistic production at a time when new exhibition formats, models and methodologies began to question the autonomy of artistic production.

This chapter goes on to consider how, at the end of the 1980s, curators returned to working with art objects and existing artefacts, employing them as illustrative fragments within thematic, a-historical exhibitions. Such large-scale, temporary projects – by curators such as Szeemann, Jan Höet and Rudi Fuchs – came to be understood as the sole work of the 'curator-as-auteur', with exhibitions being articulated as the curators' individual works of art. As we shall see, from a survey of early curatorial anthologies from the period, this trend continued into the 1990s, creating an unprecedented hyper-visibility for certain individual

[17] See Quéloz, Catherine, Schneiter, Liliane, and Vergara-Bastiand, Alice. 'Co&Co&Co: Co-production, Co-operation, Co-llaboration.' *Magasin 1986-2006*, Ed. Yves Aupetitallot (Grenoble and Zurich, Le Magasin and JRP Ringier, 2006), p. 188.

curators. Perhaps not surprisingly, this period coincided with the perception of curatorial practice as a powerfully-represented, internationally-networked mode of individual creative practice and with the origins of a new subject area for a generation of proto-curators in the mid-to-late 1990s.

Chapter Two reflects upon the practice of curating in the context of large-scale international exhibitions in order to illustrate how the proliferation of new biennials in the 1990s enabled a greater level of international visibility for certain curators. Through a study of biennial catalogues, exhibition reviews and critical literature – alongside in-depth interviews with high-profile biennial curators – this chapter tracks the development of discussions around globalism, nomadic curating and issues of transculturalism. Taking as its starting point, 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' (Paris, 1989), curated by Jean Hubert-Martin and Mark Francis, this chapter examines Okwui Enwezor's 'Trade Routes, History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennial' (1997) and 'Documenta11' (2002), Francesco Bonami's '50th Biennale di Venezia: Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer' (2003), Catherine David's 'Documenta X' (1997), Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun's Istanbul Biennial (2005) and successive Manifesta exhibitions. In considering the process through which biennials began to be embraced as a productive model for increasingly diverse, transcultural exhibitions, this chapter also aims to demonstrate how, more recently, biennials have recognised the limitations of this model and of the single curator position by introducing curatorial groupings and collaborations and using exhibitions as expanded platforms for discussions that transcend the notion of the exhibition as a finite event.

Expanding on the curator-as-auteur analogy, Chapter Three focuses on the concept of the 'curator-as-artist', scrutinising the convergence of curatorial and artistic practice that ostensibly took place during the 1990s, bringing with it a dissolution of the previously-distinct roles of artist and curator. It begins by outlining how the group exhibition has come to be understood as the main presentation medium of art, with curating considered as a medium of self-presentation. Focusing on the tension between this expanded understanding of curatorial practice and its effects on artistic production from as early as the 1970s, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the group exhibition has become an artistic medium for artists and curators alike. In doing so, it provides the theoretical backdrop to my own artist-curatorial practice as outlined in detail in Part Two of this submission.

The body text of this submission, therefore, aims to demonstrate how curating may be considered as a 'discursive formation' in the terms formulated by Foucault, whereby certain forms of writing, speaking and discussing within a specific field of enquiry are noted for the particular ways in which the individual has communicated.[18] So, when the term 'curatorial discourse' is used, it is in the sense that Foucault established an understanding of discourse as a meaningful, but malleable, term for a group of statements brought together and classified as belonging to the same discursive formation, '[t]reating [discourse] sometimes as the general domain of all statements, sometimes as an individualizable group of statements, and sometimes as a regulated practice that accounts for a certain number of statements.'[19]

IV. Part Two: Practice-Led Research

Alongside historical and theoretical research, the curatorial 'practice' component of this submission is comprised of four gallery-based exhibition projects, as described in Part Two and supported by an illustrated PowerPoint presentation of images documenting the projects (Appendix Two). This section describes how these exhibitions marked a shift in my own curatorial practice, away from working with existing artworks, towards a more collaborative form of exhibition-making. These four inter-connected exhibitions operated as testing sites for approaches suggested in the other areas of research and enacted a self-reflective response to the question: how and through whom is an exhibition made?

By setting out a central organisational strategy of dividing up each exhibition into three spatial categories – the background, the middle-ground and the foreground – a method for structuring each exhibition-making process is proposed, and three terms of reference for organising material are prescribed. By setting out this strategy prior to the production stage, the intention is to demonstrate how an individual style of exhibition-making may be maintained across four disparate exhibitions in which a visual style is maintained throughout, while each exhibition functions as a distinct curatorial project. In order to demonstrate how the act of curating has the potential to be an artistic medium of

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[18] Foucault, Michel. op. cit. p. 143:
By the form of positivity of their discourse, or more exactly, this form of positivity (and the conditions of operation of the enunciative function) defines a field in which formal identities, thematic continuities, translations of concepts, and polemical interchanges may be deployed. Thus, positivity plays the role of what might be called a historical a priori.

[19] Ibid. p. 90.

production, it was conceived that a recognisable, subjective, curatorial approach would become evident across these exhibition platforms. For each project, artists were invited to respond to an imposed curatorial proposition, strategy or structure that would result in artworks forming part of the exhibition's whole, which would not have emerged without such impositions being made.

This dissertation attempts to demonstrate how the group exhibition has opened up a range of curatorial approaches to the exploration of artistic practice while facilitating a contextual framework for a diverse range of artistic practices under a single rubric. As a site within which a subjective curatorial language is produced, encoded and enunciated, each exhibition acts as a particular part of a communication system that is developed connectively in relation to the next. This section, submitted as Part Two, seeks to examine how certain categories of organisation can be applied to the production process form as a means of revealing how group exhibitions are the result of complex negotiations and dialogical relations between curators and artists as exhibition co-producers. During this process, the curatorial practice under discussion intentionally moved towards a more collective form of activity, through working directly with artists on every aspect of the production and through making evident, within the resulting exhibition form, how every element of the respective projects was the result of a co-productive process.

As a means of examining certain key concepts that emerged during the research process, curatorial practice and theoretical study were developed in tandem; this interconnectivity is made evident through a retrospective account of exhibition outcomes, which are supported by documentation in Appendix Two. This section also aims to show how the process of gathering information through interviews operated as a research tool which fed the practice, in particular those interviews with Liam Gillick, AA Bronson and Lawrence Weiner whose work became of central importance to both my historical research and to the exhibition projects.

V. Synopsis

The main aims of the research presented in this dissertation are as follows:

1) to select and identify key exhibitions and curatorial literature and to locate those curators and authors responsible for them.
2) to study the literature relevant to these individuals.
3) to develop and to structure a series of leading questions relevant to these subjects and to conduct audio interviews with them for the purpose of transcribing into textual form.
4) to collate and produce a personal archive of transcribed interviews.
5) to study these interviews alongside those exhibitions and publications discussed therein and to distinguish common threads between individual curators' praxis.[20]
6) to establish an historical lineage between these positions from the late 1960s onwards.
7) to identify the key concerns for curatorial practitioners working during the period under discussion.
8) to expand upon the issues outlined and analyse each interview and their relationship to the relevant literature and exhibition histories.
9) to investigate the shifting relationship between different curatorial practices and types of individual modes of authorship within these discussions between 1987 and 2006.
10) to make evident the inter-relationship between the interview material, dissertation and practice-led research.
11) to provide a close analysis of this evidence.
12) to clearly demonstrate how artistic and curatorial practice have converged through the transformation of the perceived parameters of the group exhibition form.

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[20] Throughout this dissertation I have often chosen to use the term 'praxis' as preferred to 'practice'. Praxis is meant here not as a loose substitute for practice but to imply that the praxis of curating is part of a process of putting theoretical knowledge into action and, as such, is a conscious and intentional form of experiential learning. Praxis often starts from an informed and intentional position and can, over time and through an ongoing cycle of related actions, be a means of generating more learned ways in which such actions can inform and reframe future strategies and operational models. One definition, by Paulo Freire, is 'as a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society, and become critically conscious human beings. Praxis comprises a cycle of action-reflection-action which is central to liberatory education. Characteristics of praxis include self-determination (as opposed to coercion), intentionality (as opposed to reaction), creativity (as opposed to homogeneity), and rationality (as opposed to chance).' Paulo Freire cited at http://www.sef.org.pk/educatewebsite/educate2fol/glosiconedu2.asp (accessed 21/03/07). See also Sullivan, Graeme. *Art Practice as Research* (Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2005), pp. 26-28. Here, Sullivan puts forward a view of 'praxis' as a discussion of theories and issues alongside a parallel practice which relates to these discussions, in order to 'create visions, structures, and methods' with the need to deconstruct them and to be 'critical, for perspective is knowingly or unknowingly framed around myths.' For Sullivan, this is the very basis of 'praxis,' 'for theory without action is mere rhetoric, and action without theory is anarchy.' Ibid. p. 27.

13) to produce four new exhibition projects that demonstrate how this convergence can be made apparent through the process of exhibition making.

14) to provide documentation and written descriptions of these processes.

15) to show how theoretical and historical research can provide a critical framework for curatorial practice.

PART ONE: THE BODY OF TEXT

Chapter One
The Emergence of Curatorial Discourse from the Late 1960s to the Present

Introduction

Given the sheer volume of printed material on and around curatorial practice – especially that published since I began research for this dissertation in 2003, not to mention the enormous number of texts that accompany each curatorial outing such as press releases, catalogues, interviews and/or exhibition reviews – to begin this undertaking is to confront a mass of conflicting opinions about what constitutes the changing role of the contemporary curator. As it is my intention to examine not what has been realised under the rubric of curatorial practice but what has been discussed, articulated and written about curating contemporary art during the period from the late 1980s until now, it is this diverse material – publications, statements and anecdotes – that concerns me. By studying the official documents and ephemera from this period, it is my aim to identify and illustrate how certain discursive trends have developed, which have configured and supported a more central position for the individual curator.

In the 1960s, artists and curators began to question 'the artistic freedom and aesthetic autonomy accorded them by society – an autonomy that reached a certain culmination in high modernist aestheticism.'[21] Since then, there has been a gradual change from the perception of the curator-as-carer and behind-the-scenes aesthetic arbiter to a more centralised position on a much broader stage, with a proactive creative and political part to play in the production, mediation and dissemination of art itself. While it is not my main ambition to offer a chronological treatment of these trends, it has been necessary to establish certain key moments of historical conjuncture since the late 1960s, in order to articulate how these tendencies have emerged, how they have been sustained and how they have contributed to dominant discourses on curatorial practice in recent years.

[21] Artist Andrea Fraser quoted in Comer, Stuart. 'Art Must Hang: An Interview with Andrea Fraser about the Whitney Independent Study Program', *Afterthought: New Writing on Conceptual Art*, Ed. Mike Sperlinger (London, Rachmaninoff, 2005), p. 32.

1.1: The Emergence of the Independent Exhibition-Maker in the Late 1960s

During the early 20th century, many attempts were made to subvert the conventional form of exhibitions and, although many of these were commissioned by or with exhibition organisers and museum directors at the time, these efforts were predominantly attributed to artists and designers beginning to question the efficacy of aesthetic practice as part of a wider critique of the historical institutions of art. In 1974, Peter Bürger argued in his *Theory of the Avant-Garde* that any consideration of the avant-garde of the early 20th century must understand the movements as *critiques* of art and literature, as institutions in and of themselves, with the social function of art as the primary object of any analysis of this period.[22] From Frederick Kiesler's exhibition design for 'Exhibition of New Theater Technique'[23] (at Konzerthaus, Vienna in 1924), to El Lissitzky's *Abstract Cabinet*[24] (constructed between 1927 and 1928 for the Landesmuseum, Hanover), to Marcel Duchamp's *Mile of String*[25] (included as part of 'First Papers of Surrealism' at Whitelaw Reid Mansion, New York in 1942), subversion of overall exhibition design and layout provided a critique of the passive experience of

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[22] See Bürger, Peter. *Theorie der Avantgarde*, (Frankfurt, Suhrkamp, 1974); later published as Bürger, Peter. *The Theory of the Avant-Garde*, transl. Michael Shaw (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[23] In 1924, when Kiesler designed the 'Exhibition of New Theater Technique' at Konzerthaus, Vienna, he invented a new method of installation design which was mobile, interchangeable and flexible, allowing for multiple displays within a singular design unit. The 'Leger and Trager' or 'L' and 'T' system created a new language of 'form composed of free-standing, demountable display units of vertical and horizontal beams that supported vertical and horizontal rectangular panels.' Cited in Staniszewski, Mary Anne. *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998), p. 4. The exhibition contained more than 600 unframed posters, designs, drawings, photographs and architectural models which were mounted or placed on these L and T structures. These structures also had cantilevers that allowed the viewer to adjust the height of the work to their own eye levels. The exhibition design structure was freestanding and disconnected from the physical architectural interior of the exhibition venue. Artworks were not attached to any wall or permanent architectural feature; instead, the works were displayed on flexible units, which could be changed and rearranged easily. The system was mobile and could be adapted to the specific demands of a particular exhibition space. The emphasis of Kiesler's exhibition design was the physical framework of the exhibition, its flexibility and the interaction of the viewer within the exhibition space rather than the works on show. The viewer became the active agent within the reception of the work of art. This interest in spectators' interactivity and movement through the viewing space of the exhibition was an obvious progression from late 19th and early 20th century observational inventions like the diorama and panorama, but it also suggested a type of proactive 'reader in the text' scenario, identified with post-structuralist analysis and the notion that meaning is located at the point of reception. See O'Neill, Paul. 'Curating (U) topics', *Art Monthly*, No. 272, (December/January, 2003-04), pp. 7-10.

[24] Like many of Lissitzky's exhibition designs, *Abstract Cabinet* was also a solution as to how to exhibit a lot of works in a relatively small space and, like his *Room for Constructivist Art* (Dresden, 1926), was as much ideological as it was practical. Lissitzky's stated purpose with his *Abstract Cabinet* was to challenge the traditionally passive experience of art at a time when urban design was being used to produce a more active response in the capitalist consumer. Lissitzky's interest in a proactive viewer was symptomatic 'not only of a crisis in the representation(s) of the Modernist paradigm, but also a crisis of audience relations.' See Barry, Judith. 'Dissenting Spaces', *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), p. 310.

[25] For a detailed account of Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and André Breton's involvement with the Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930-40s see Kachur, Lewis. *Displaying the Marvellous: Marcel Duchamp, Salvador Dalí and Surrealist Exhibition Installations*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2001).

art and its exhibition space. In what Bürger called a 'critique of institutions', artists employed the exhibition as a primary space for the general and destructive critique of the institutions of art 'from the outside' of the Establishment. Bürger's thesis was centred on the concept that 'the social subsystem that is art enters the stage of self-criticism' whereby artists of the early avant-garde began to criticise 'art as an institution and the course of its development' as an inherent part of their practice.[26]

By the late 1940s, early forms of installation art – such as Lucio Fontana's *Ambiente Nero* (1949), Yves Klein's *Le Vide* (1958), Arman's *Le Plein* (1960), Allan Kaprow's *Happenings and Environments* (1959-late 1960s) or Claes Oldenburg's *The Store* (1961-62) – brought the site-bound nature of exhibitions to the fore as 'the very material of the artwork.'[27] With their emphasis on the context of the work of art and by proclaiming each specific exhibition space to be an incorporated part of the work of art, artists pushed for greater control over the reception of the work, its presentation in the exhibition context and beyond, as a means of restricting the mediating function of art institutions, organisers and curators alike. The exhibition space functioned as the main context of, and the primary medium for, the realisation of the artwork and, at the same time, as the site in which the work of art adapted and was modified.[28]

Prior to the late 1960s, there had been a number of influential museum directors – such as Alexander Dorner at the Hannover Landesmuseum in the 1920s, Willem Sandberg at the Stedelijk Museum (Amsterdam) in the 1940s, Pontus Hultén at Moderna Museet

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[26] Bürger, Peter. op. cit. p. 22. See also Stemmrich, Gregor. 'Heterotopias of the Cinematographic: Institutional Critique and Cinema in the Art of Michael Asher and Dan Graham', *Art After Conceptual Art*, Eds. Alexander Alberro and Sabeth Buchmann (Cambridge, MA, and London, MIT Press, 2006), p. 137.

[27] See Calderoni, Irene. 'Creating Shows: Some Notes on Exhibition Aesthetics at the End of the Sixties', *Curating Subjects*, Ed. Paul O'Neill (London and Amsterdam, Open Editions and De Appel, 2007), p. 66. For detailed accounts of these early avant-garde exhibitions, see Altshuler, Bruce. *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition: New Art in the 20th Century*, (Berkeley and London, University of California Press, 1994); Staniszewski, Mary Anne. The *Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998); O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1999).
At the very end of the 1990s, publications also began to appear that focused on individual curatorial innovations from the 20th century, such as the exploration into Marcel Duchamp and Salvador Dalí's curatorial roles in the Surrealist exhibitions of the 1930s to 1940s in Kachur, Lewis.op. cit. Gordon Kantor, Sybil. *Alfred H.Barr, Jr. and the Intellectual Origins of the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2002) looked at the role played by Alfred H. Barr in the foundations of the Museum of Modern Art – part intellectual biography, part institutional history; Alberro, Alexander. *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2003) focused on Seth Siegelaub's curatorial practice of the 1960s, and two monographs on Harald Szeemann have been published since his death: Müller, Hans-Joachim. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2005) and Bezzola, Tobia and Kurzmeyer, Roman. *Harald Szeemann: with by through because towards despite – Catalogue of All Exhibitions, 1957-2001*, (Vienna and New York, Springer Verlag, 2007).

[28] See Calderoni, Irene. op. cit. pp. 66-70.

(Stockholm) in the 1950s and Jean Leering at the Van Abbe Museum (Eindhoven) in the early 1960s – who initiated numerous innovative displays with artists, designers and architects, transforming the museum from a repository of historical art into a place for exhibitions that reflected upon and showcased the contemporary art of the time. What distinguishes the late 1960s from earlier years is the first appearance of organisers of contemporary art exhibitions, independent of fixed museum posts. Discussion of their projects was centred on the figure of the curator as a *producer* of the exhibition form, which was arrived at through their grouping-together of related artworks and artists whose work had similar concerns.[29] Bruce Altshuler retrospectively claimed that this critical moment in 20th century exhibition history was the beginning of 'the world of advanced exhibitions' and 'the rise of the curator as creator' which would reach its zenith in the 1990s, when there was a radical increase in the number of large-scale, recurring, international exhibitions and a heightened visibility for the figure of the curator within discussions on art, internationalism and related discourses.[30] According to Julia Bryan-Wilson, these so-called advanced exhibitions provided the prestigious 'launching pads for the curatorial star system' in an 'age of curatorial studies', in which the 'institutional basis of art is taken as a given, and the marketing and packaging of contemporary art has become a specialized focus of inquiry for thousands of students.'[31]

What differentiates discussions around exhibition-making after the 1960s from those preceding them is that they move beyond self-criticism by artists to include the praxis of exhibition organisers, gallerists, critics and curators, who not only generated alternative, innovative and critical forms of exhibition, but also questioned the traditional understanding of what constituted the boundaries of art's production. Through various

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[29] 'The Producers' was the umbrella title for a series of public discussions with contemporary curators organised by the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art and the University of Newcastle in Gateshead, England, between 2000 and 2002. The transcripts were published as: *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2000) which featured James Lingwood & Sune Nordgren and Clive Phillpot & Matthew Higgs; *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (2)*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2000) featured Gilane Tawadros & Hans Ulrich Obrist, Frances Morris & Charles Esche and Guy Brett & Deanna Petherbridge; *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (3)*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2001) featured Sharon Kivland & Adam Szymczyk, Ralph Rugoff & Richard Grayson and Lisa Corrin & Jon Bewley; *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (4)*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2001) featured Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev & Liam Gillick, Ute Meta Bauer & Mark Nash and Jeremy Millar & Teresa Gleadowe; *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (5)*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2002) featured Andrew Renton & Sacha Craddock, Jonathan Watkins & Laura Godfrey-Isaacs and James Putman & Barbara London.

[30] Altshuler, Bruce. op. cit. p. 236.

[31] Bryan-Wilson, Julia. 'A Curriculum for Institutional Critique, or the Professionalization of Conceptual Art', *New Institutionalism, Verksted no.1*, Ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo, Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003), pp. 102-3.

adaptations of the exhibition form, the curator began to take on the artist's creative mantle, whereby the traditional roles of artist, curator and critic were collapsed and conflated. What Bürger called the 'abolition of autonomous art' and its integration into the 'praxis of life'[32] occurred at the level of art's social subsystem i.e. an art world that included critics, curators, gallerists and art dealers. By 1969, the conflation of art and curatorial praxis was already causing confusion as to what actually constituted the medium of the artist, the curator and the critic. For example, Peter Plagen's review of '557,087', the massive 1969 exhibition curated by Lucy Lippard in Seattle, suggested that 'There [was] a total style to the show, a style so pervasive as to suggest that Lucy Lippard is in fact the artist and that her medium is other artists.'[33] Lippard later replied, 'Of course a critic's medium is always artists; critics are the original appropriators.'[34]

From the mid-1980s onwards, the American response (in particular that of Benjamin Buchloh, Hal Foster, Andrea Fraser and students of the Whitney Independent Study Program such as Joshua Decter, Mark Dion and others) to Bürger's 'critique of institutions' was to re-name it 'institutional critique.'[35] Institutional Critique began to encompass the specific 'neo-avant-garde'[36] praxis of such artists as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren, Dan Graham, Hans Haacke and Lawrence Weiner. Such artists, Hal Foster claimed, were primarily interested in turning 'critique of the conventions of the traditional museums, as performed by Dada, Constructivism, and

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[32] Bürger, Peter. op. cit. pp. 52-54.

[33] Peter Plagen's review of '557,087', appeared in *Artforum*, (November, 1969) and is cited here from Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art World from 1966 to 1972*, (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California Press, 1997 [first published in 1973]), p. xiv. '557,087', which took place in various venues at the Seattle Art Museum's World Fair Annex, took its title from the then-current population of Seattle and included card catalogues, index cards and earthworks. Many of the outdoor works were fabricated or produced by Lippard herself, according to artists' instructions. This was determined as much by economic limitations as by the curator's theoretical approach to exhibition production.

[34] Ibid. p. xv.

[35] Andrea Fraser was probably the first to use the term 'institutional critique' in print in her essay on Louise Lawler: Fraser, Andrea. 'In and Out of Place', *Art in America*, Vol. 73, No. 6, (June, 1985), p. 124. She wrote, 'while very different, all these artists engage(d) in institutional critique.' The term is often applied to a number of artists from the neo-avant-garde of the 1960s such as Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke as the second generation of artists engaging in Institutional Critique (after Duchamp and the Dadaists), followed by a third generation of artists such as Mark Dion, Andrea Fraser, Renée Green, Louise Lawler and Martha Rosler, practising from the late 1970s onwards. See also Fraser's assessment of the subsequent 'institutionalisation' of Institutional Critique in Fraser, Andrea. 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, Vol. XLIV, No. 1, (Sept, 2005), pp. 278-283. For a recent anthology of texts looking at the legacy of institutional critique, see *Institutional Critique and After*, Ed. John C. Welchman (Zurich, JRP Ringier, 2006). This publication stems from a symposium that was held in May, 2005 at the Bing Theater at Los Angeles County Museum of Art.

[36] The 'neo-avant-garde' was the general term used by Bürger, probably with pejorative intent, to represent post-war artistic developments following the historical avant-garde. It is unlikely that Bürger was familiar with the practice of Buren, Haacke, Weiner et al. when he first published his text in 1974.

other historical avant-gardes, into an investigation of the institution of art, its perceptual and cognitive, structural and discursive parameters.'[37]

In this context, Institutional Critique is understood as operating primarily as a 'critique from the inside,' directed at the institutional basis of art and its systems of institutionalisation.[38] As Benjamin Buchloh writes, 'In fact an institutional critique became the central focus of [these] artists' assaults on the false neutrality of vision that provides the underlying rationale for those institutions.'[39] Institutional Critique is, therefore, generally defined by its apparent object, the institution, which includes museums, galleries and the established, organised sites for the presentation of art and its mediation, the art market, art magazines and art criticism. As Andrea Fraser suggests, no matter how immaterial, relational, public, or prominent its placement is, 'Art is art when it exists for discourses and practices that recognise it as art, value and evaluate it as art, and consume it as art, whether as object, gesture, representation, or only idea...'[40] What is announced as art is always already institutionalised, simply because it exists within the perception of those involved in the field of art i.e. 'The institution of art is not something external to any work but the irreducible condition of its existence as art.'[41]

The 1960s, therefore, marked a key movement away from the prevailing notion of the professional museum curator towards a more independent practice. The terms *Ausstellungsmacher* (in German) and *faiseur d'expositions* (in French) began to be used, to represent an intellectual figure operating counter to the museum, who organised large-scale, independent exhibitions of contemporary art and was understood as someone who had spent a long time operating within the art world, usually without a fixed institutional post, who influenced public opinion through their exhibitions.

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[37] Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge, MA and London, MIT Press, 1996), p. 20.

[38] See Stemmrich, Gregor. op.cit. p. 137. See also Bürger, Peter. op. cit.

[39] Buchloh, Benjamin. 'Conceptual Art 1962-1969: From the Aesthetics of Administration to the Critique of Institutions', *October*, No.55, (Winter, 1990), pp. 105-143.

[40] See Fraser, Andrea. 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', op. cit. p. 281.

[41] Ibid. p. 281.

The closest understanding of *Ausstellungsmacher* in English is of an author as 'independent exhibition-maker',[42] primarily referencing the activities of a few curators who began operating between the 1960s and early 1970s such as curator and critic Germano Celant – who coined the term 'Arte Povera';[43] Konrad Fischer – who initially worked as the artist Konrad Lueg but began organising exhibitions independently, under the name Fischer, before opening his own Düsseldorf gallery in October 1967; Walter Hopps – who began organising exhibitions during the 1950s, founded the Ferus Gallery in California, with artist Edward Kienholz, in 1956 and became director of Pasadena Art Museum in 1962; Pontus Hultén – who started curating exhibitions at a small gallery called The Collector in Stockholm during the 1950s and became director of Moderna Museet, Stockholm, in 1958; Seth Siegelaub and Harald Szeemann.

Curator Charles Esche, interviewed in 2003, suggested that the designation of the curator as *Ausstellungsmacher* wrongly applied a completely different concept to a word that had been in use since the eighteenth century to describe the curator as the carer of a collection, 'So you could say we should actually find another [word], because I am not sure that that historical connection is very useful.'[44] As Carlos Basualdo also stated, in an essay on the subject of curating large-scale exhibitions, previous reference points which situate the curator as a discerning critic or an interpretative historian – describing 'a relatively unfamiliar figure who must negotiate the distance between, on the one hand, the value system traditionally established by critic and art historian and, on the other, the ideological pressures and practices corresponding to the institutional setting in which such events emerge' – are no longer useful as a means of understanding the role of the contemporary curator.[45]

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[42] The term 'exhibition-maker', as opposed to 'curator', was used by Harald Szeemann to describe his practice right up until his death in 2005. For a personal historical reflection on this period, see Fleck, Robert. 'Teaching Curating', *MJ – Manifesta Journal of Contemporary Curatorship: Teaching Curatorship*, 4, (Autumn/Winter, 2004), pp. 18-21. For further information on the career histories of Pontus Hultén and Walter Hopps, see 'Pontus Hultén' and 'Walter Hopps', *Hans Ulrich Obrist Interviews Volume 1*, Ed. Thomas Boutoux (Milan, Edizioni Charta, 2003), pp. 450-466 and 411-430, respectively.

[43] In 1967, Celant published 'Arte Povera Art Povera', *Flash Art*, No. 5, (November/December, 1967). Celant's text also appeared in the catalogue, 'Arte Povera/Im Spazio', published in the same year to accompany the exhibition 'Arte Povera/Im Spazio' (Genoa, La Bertesca/Masnata/Trentalance, 1967). Arte Povera or 'Poor Art' was coined by Celant in this text and accompanying exhibition and was used to describe a broad group of artists predominantly working in Italy during the late 1960s through the 1970s, which Celant identified as using forms of expression often using 'poor' ephemeral materials incorporating both organic and industrial materials that investigated the relationships between life and art and included artists Giovanni Anselmo, Alighiero E. Boetti, Luciano Fabro, Jannis Kounellis, Mario Merz, Marisa Merz, Giulio Paolini, Giuseppe Penone, and Michelangelo Pistolletto.

[44] Esche, Charles. 'Beti Zerovc interviews Charles Esche', *Modest Proposals*, Ed. Charles Esche (Istanbul, Baglam Publishing, 2005), p. 89. First published in *SITE magazine* 6, (2003), http://www.sitemagazine.net/sve/6.htm

[45] Basualdo, Carlos. 'The Unstable Institution', *What Makes a Great Art Exhibition?* Ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006), p. 59.

Up until the late 1960s, freelance exhibition-making remained at a relatively localised and national level. Then, individuals such as Siegelaub and Szeemann began to contextualise divergent contemporary art scenes – with artists linked to Fluxus, Arte Povera, Post-Minimal and Conceptual Art practices from the US, Europe, the UK and Latin America – into international group exhibitions for the first time. Examples of key exhibitions at the time include Harald Szeemann's 'When Attitudes Become Form: Works, Concepts, Processes, Situations, Information'[46] and 'Happening and Fluxus',[47] 'January 5-31, 1969' curated by Seth Siegelaub[48] 'Op Losse Schroeven: Situaties en Cryptostructuren' (Square Pegs in Round Holes), curated by Wim Beeren;[49] 'Anti-Illusion: Procedures/Materials' curated by Marcia Tucker and James Monte;[50] 'Spaces' curated by Jennifer Licht;[51] '557,087' curated by Lucy Lippard[52] and 'Information' curated by Kynaston McShine.[53] Through many of these exhibitions, international recognition was gained for both artists and curators alike and, although these exhibitions were responsive to less object-oriented artistic praxis, many of them took place in established museums and art galleries.

Interviewed in 1969, Tommaso Trini applied the term 'museographical emergency' to describe the problematic condition generated by the introduction of artworks with a process-orientated dimension into the museum context.[54] For Trini, the dilemmas raised appeared to be irreconcilable because the fixity of traditional museum space contrasted markedly with the temporal nature of many of these interventions. Others, however, have argued that these exhibitions were a successful hybrid of artistic research and exhibition aesthetics; Irene Calderoni writes:

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[46] At Kunsthalle Bern, 22 March-23 April, 1969; Museum Haus Lange, Krefeld, 9 May-15 June, 1969; Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 28 September-27 October, 1969.

[47] At Kölnischner Kunstverein, 1970 organised with Hans Sohm.

[48] At Seth Siegelaub Gallery, New York, 1969.

[49] At Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 1969.

[50] At Whitney Museum, New York, 1969.

[51] At MoMA, New York, 1969.

[52] At Art Museum, Seattle, 1969.

[53] At MoMA, New York, 1970.

[54] Trini, Tommaso. 'The Prodigal Master's Trilogy', *Domus*, 478, (September, 1969), unpaginated.

> The curatorial practice of this period was also profoundly involved in the evolution of artistic languages, to the extent that the exhibition medium, as well as the role of the curator itself, was drastically redefined... Multiple aspects, ranging from display techniques to catalogue design and from advertising strategies to the artist-institution relationship, rendered these shows innovative with respect to traditional shows. The innovation, or, rather, the common matrix connecting them all, lies in the fact that, from hereon, the spatial and temporal context of artistic production would coincide with the context of the exhibition.[55]

What these various exhibitions had in common was a symbiotic relationship between the exhibition space and artistic production, where the exhibition, the artworks, and the curatorial framework were essential elements in a process which would culminate in a final public exhibition. In most cases, the exhibited artworks did not exist before the exhibitions, but were created for and within them, with significant consequences for the status of both the works and the exhibitions. Calderoni continues, 'This resulted in the emergence of an awareness of the centrality of the presentation of the artwork, as well as the idea that the artwork operates as a function of, and is limited to, that place and that moment.'[56] In other words, artists and curators were involved in a parallel process of making and organising, geared towards a future moment of display, with the eventual exhibition being the result of these labours and with art often being specifically created or adapted for particular exhibitions instead of being available as pre-existent, fixed, autonomous works ready for selection and display.[57]

This focus, on the *process* of exhibition-making, meant that the traditional segregation of artistic production from its mediation was no longer so easily established. The work of the artist was less easily demarcated from that of the curator at a time when artists were employing mediation strategies in their practice, through the use of text, linguistics and system theories, which resulted in more conceptual outcomes. As the artist Robert Barry claimed in 1969, 'The *word* "art" is becoming less of a noun and more of a verb... Thinking not so much about the objects themselves as what possibilities are

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[55] Calderoni, Irene. op. cit. pp. 64-65.

[56] Ibid. p. 65.

[57] For a more detailed analysis of these developments in relation to these exhibitions, see Calderoni, Irene. Ibid. It is worth noting that, in 1973, Lucy Lippard began archiving and documenting many of these conceptual art exhibitions, performances, occurrences and publications, in order to establish a history as a complete recording of these events. See Lippard, Lucy. op. cit. For a comprehensive chronology of these exhibitions, see also Jenkins, Susan. 'Information, Communication, Documentation: An Introduction to the Chronology of Group Exhibitions and Bibliographies', *Reconsidering the Object of Art: 1965-1975*, Eds. Ann Goldstein and Anne Rorimer (Los Angeles, MoCA, 1996), pp. 269-275.

inherent in them and what the ideas are in them.'[58] Barry's articulation of art as a verb is one of many definitions of 'conceptual art,'[59] which suggested that an understanding of art was no longer restricted to that which was materialised as the objects of art, but could also encompass the production of ideas about art which could, in themselves, also be constituted as art. Art could be that which was verbalised, spoken of or written about. Art as a material practice become inseparable from art as a discursive practice. As much as art could be made present in the world, through language and the articulation of ideas, these ideas could be the medium as well as the outcome of artistic production. And, if art could be an idea, then those involved in producing and employing ideas as their medium could also be said to be the producers of art, whether they called themselves curators, critics or artists. As ideas require mediation (of some means or another), so the mediation of art and the conception of art as that which is mediated become conflated.

Alongside the erosion of distinct categories in relation to the production of art-as-ideas, artists were taking on functions formerly associated with the critic or the curator, such as writing and exhibition organising. As the 1960s' gallerist, art dealer and curator Seth Siegelaub later said:

> [A]ll the different art world categories were breaking down at the time: the idea of gallery dealer, curator, artist-curator, critic-writer, painter-writer, all these categories were becoming fuzzy, less clear. In a certain way, it was part of the 1960s political project. The 'information society' was up and running, and many of these different areas were very touch and go, people were moving between things and doing many different things.[60]

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[58] Barry, Robert. 'Interview with Patricia Norvell, 30 May, 1969', *Recording Conceptual Art*, Eds. Alexander Alberro and Patricia Norvell (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2001), p. 97. Italics in original.

[59] One of the earliest definitions of 'conceptual art' can be traced back to Henry Flynt's essay 'Concept Art' from 1961, when he stated: 'Concept art is first of all an art of which the material is *concepts*, as e.g. the material of music is sound. Since *concepts* are closely bound up with language, concept art is a kind of art of which the material is language.' See Flynt, Henry. 'Concept Art.', *An Anthology of Chance Operations, Indeterminacy, Improvisation, Concept Art, Anti-Art, Meaningless Work, Natural Disasters, Stories, Diagrams, Music, Dance, Constructions, Compositions, Mathematics, Plans of Action*, Ed. La Monte Young (New York, La Monte Young and Jackson Mac Low, 1963), unpaginated, italics in original. 'Conceptual art' has become most widely applied to a group of artists interested in the 'dematerialisation' of the art object in the period between 1966-1972 in the Americas, Europe, England, Australia and Asia as documented by Lucy Lippard in Lippard, Lucy. *Six Years: The Dematerialisation of the Art World from 1966 to 1972*, op. cit. More recently, Peter Osborne described it as 'art *about* the cultural act of definition – paradigmatically, but by no means exclusively, the definition of 'art'. See Osborne, Peter. *Conceptual Art (Themes and Movements)*, (London, Phaidon Press, 2002), p. 14, italics in original. Exhibitions such as 'Global Conceptualism' at the Queens Museum of Art, New York in 1993 have argued for an expansion in the geographical breadth of conceptual art activity during the 1960s-70s, to include Soviet Russia, Eastern Europe and China. See the catalogue from the exhibition: *Global Conceptualism: Points of Origin, 1950s-1980s*. Eds. Luis Camnitzer, Jane Ferver, Rachel Weiss et al (New York, Queens Museum of Art, 1999).

[60] Siegelaub, Seth. Interview with the author, Amsterdam, 27/07/04, p. 4. See Appendix One: SI.

1.2: Demystification and the Role of the Mediator in the Late 1960s

In the late 1960s, Siegelaub applied the term 'demystification' to the changing condition of exhibition production, in recognition of the fact that curators, artists and critics were beginning to acknowledge the influential mediating component within an exhibition's formation, production and dissemination.[61] Demystification was described as 'A process in which we attempted to understand and be conscious of our actions; to make clear what we and others were doing, so you have to deal with [curating] consciously as part of the art exhibiting process, for good or bad'.[62] For Siegelaub, demystification was a necessary process in revealing and evaluating the more hidden curatorial components of an exhibition, making evident that the actions of curators had an impact on which artworks were exhibited and how they were produced, mediated and distributed. As an historical precedent, Siegelaub had inadvertently identified what was to become one of the most pertinent issues in curatorial discourse, as Joshua Decter's statement from 2000 illustrates:

> ...cultural institutions and museums would prefer that the 'invisible' forces of contemporary art exhibitions remain precisely that – invisible. So much of what happens inside...cultural institutions remains hidden from the public's view, and, often, even from the eyes of the specialised art crowd.[63]

'Visibility' is, to Decter, what demystification was to Siegelaub: an urgency to expose the hidden processes behind the exhibiting of art, by making curatorial processes more

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[61] Much of the discussion around Siegelaub's curatorial projects benefits from considerable hindsight for, even during the 1960s, the term 'curator' was never used by Siegelaub in relation to what he was doing at the time. It is only in the context of other people's subsequent texts about his practice of the 1960s and as part of curatorial debates in the 1980s and 1990s, that Siegelaub has been called a curator. In my interview with him, he stated:

> I probably wouldn't have used the word 'curator' at the time, although I have recently done so in retrospect because there is a whole body of curatorial practice that has quantitatively evolved since then...While I can look back now and say that curating is probably what I was doing, it is not a term that I would have used when I was active for one simple reason: the dominant idea of the curator at the time was basically someone who worked for a museum. Since then, the definition of the term curator has changed. This is just another facet which reflects how the art world has changed since the 1960s/early 1970s; the art world has become much bigger, richer, more omnipresent; there are many more museums, galleries, artists, art bars, art schools, art lovers, etc. It is has also become more central and more attached to the dominant values of capitalist society...It is clear that, in the last thirty years or so, art has become a more acceptable profession, even a type of business, a more acceptable thing to do, both as a practitioner, as well as an art collector. One can think of becoming an artist as a possible 'career choice' now, which just didn't exist back then. One just didn't have this opportunity. The question of the curator, in this context, is also related to another modern phenomenon today: the need for freelance curatorial energy to invigorate museums that no longer have this kind of energy.

Siegelaub, Seth. op. cit. pp. 4-6. For a comprehensive examination of Siegelaub's practice between 1965 and 1972, see Alberro, Alexander. *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, op. cit.

[62] Seth Siegelaub quoted in Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'A Conversation between Seth Siegelaub and Hans Ulrich Obrist', *Trans>*, 6, (1999), p. 56.

[63] Decter, Joshua. 'At the Verge of ... Curatorial Transparency', *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*, Ed. Catherine Thomas (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2000), pp. 102-103.

visible as components of art exhibitions. Exposing the various decision-making processes through which exhibitions are produced, demonstrates what is disseminated as art and how information about art is mediated. In other words, 'You had to understand what the curator does to understand, in part, what you are looking at in an exhibition.'[64] As Siegelaub later stated:

> I think, in our generation, we thought that we could demystify the role of the museum, the role of the collector, and the production of the artwork; for example, how the size of a gallery affects the production of art, etc. In that sense, we tried to demystify the hidden structures of the art world.[65]

As a necessary tool for understanding the changes taking place in the relationship between artistic and curatorial practice, demystification was, for Siegelaub, an attempt to expose the decisions, personal choices and hidden nuances involved in the selection and organisation of art for exhibition purposes. Demystification had the side-effect of making both the curatorial act and the public figure of the curator more visible. In the early 1960s, according to Siegelaub, curators were perceived as powerful figures, but only within the context of some greater institutional power, where their job was largely understood as being involved in the selection and presentation of art with the greatest aesthetic, cultural and historical value at that given moment.[66] As Catherine Thomas later wrote, the perception of a curator's power was directly proportional to his/her invisibility: 'Historically, the curator's "hand" or process of selection aimed for absence from the "objective" display on view. This notion of an invisible practice remained intrinsically bound to the traditional concept of the museum – a rational, neutral, and authoritative place of absolute truths and values.'[67]

By the late 1960s, the visibility of the curatorial hand made differentiation between the author of the work of art and the independent curator increasingly complicated.[68] Works

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[64] Seth Siegelaub quoted in Obrist, Hans Ulrich, op. cit. p. 56.

[65] See Seth Siegelaub, Interview with the author, op. cit. pp. 9-10. See Appendix One: SI.

[66] Ibid. p. 10.

[67] Thomas, Catherine. 'Introduction', *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*, op.cit, p. ix. For an historical analysis of the evolution of the curator's role in museums, see also Schubert, Karsten. *The Curator's Egg: the Evolution of the Museum Concept from the French Revolution to the Present Day*, (London, One Off Press, 2000).

[68] I use the term 'independent curator' to imply a curator operating primarily outside a fixed institutional post, such as a museum or other publicly-funded organisation or large commercial gallery. See O'Neill, Paul. 'The Co-dependent Curator', *Art Monthly*, 291, (November, 2005), pp. 7-10, where I argue in greater detail that all curators ultimately have a co-dependent relationship to such institutions and that so-called independent curating cannot exist without the necessity to work within, or receive support from, public institutions at some stage or other.

by many of the artists Siegelaub worked with – such as Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, or Lawrence Weiner – were not, primarily, object-orientated and their presentation did not result in autonomous material, or physical, outcomes. Instead, their artistic practice often involved the production of ideas, information or system-orientated outputs with a conceptual focus. Many of these 'dematerialised'[69] works necessitated some form of mediation, often as a component of the artwork itself, in order to make the work perceptible. Two cases in point were Lawrence Weiner's *One Hole in the Ground Approximately One Foot by One Foot. One Gallon Waterbased White Paint Poured into this Hole*, 23 August, 1969 – which, as a statement, linguistically defined the material structure of the work as well as its principal materials and process of production – and Robert Barry's *Inert Gas Series*, 1969, which involved the idea of, and the actual release of, gases into the environment. In order to make the artwork palpable, Siegelaub publicised it in a thirty by forty-five inch poster, sent out as an invitation/advertisement for the project to a mailing list of individuals and key institutions, which read:

> ROBERT BARRY/INERT GAS SERIES/HELIUM, NEON, ARGON, KRYPTON, XENON/ FROM A MEASURED VOLUME TO INDEFINITE EXPANSION/APRIL 1968/SETH SIEGELAUB, 6000 SUNSET BOULEVARD, HOLLYWOOD, CALIFORNIA, 90028/213 HO 4-8383.[70]

Just as advertising transfigures both the 'use value' of an object form and its 'exchange value'[71] as a commodity form into sign values, Siegelaub's posters functioned as both a sign of certification that the work existed and of authentication of the sign exchange value of the work, *in lieu* of any actual object.[72] The exhibition of the work of art was, therefore, split between Barry's ephemeral action, of which he made an audio recording, and Siegelaub's '*visual* public manifestation', in the form of a text on a poster, which

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[69] 'Dematerialisation' was the term used by Lucy R. Lippard and John Chandler in order to ascribe certain values to ideas-based art practice of the 1960s, when they suggested that a more general shift in art at the time may result in the object becoming wholly obsolete. Their text was written in 1967 and published in 1968. See Chandler, John and Lippard, Lucy R. 'The Dematerialisation of Art', *Art International*, Vol. XII, No. 2, (February, 1968), pp. 31-36.

[70] The address listed was that of a Post Office box in Los Angeles, and the telephone answering service had a message describing the piece. See Alberro, Alexander. *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, op. cit. p. 118.

[71] See Marx, Karl. *Capital*, Volume 1, trans. Ben Fowkes (London, Penguin, 1976). Marx begins *Capital* with an analysis of the idea of commodity production, where a commodity is defined as a utility object that is external to us and produced for exchange on a market. Marx suggests that all commodities have both 'use-value' and 'exchange-value', with Marx insisting that exchange value is less easily quantified than use-value and changes according to its time and place, necessitating further examination. Marx argues that changes in the exchange value of an object can be understood in terms of the amount of labour input required to produce the commodity or, rather, the socially necessary labour, that is labour exerted at the average level of intensity and productivity for that branch of activity within the economy. Marx's theory of the value of labour asserts that the exchange value of a commodity is determined by the quantity of necessary labour time required to produce the commodity.

[72] Alberro, Alexander. op. cit. p. 120.

made the exhibition of the artwork 'accessible to the public solely in the form of advertising, as pure sign.'[73] The material representation and the intrinsic elements of the artwork were part of the same exhibition, being both distinct from, and yet dependent upon, one another.

In 1969, Siegelaub remarked upon how art had changed from the idea that, when someone painted a painting, what had been done and what you saw were the same thing, to 'a case where... the art is not the same thing as how you're given information about it.'[74] It was now possible to split the artwork into what he referred to as 'primary information' – i.e. that which was the 'essence of the piece' – and 'secondary information' which was the material information used to make one aware of the piece and its 'form of presentation.'[75]

Changes in the curating of art not only involved the detached application of new techniques of distribution and display, but the means of presentation also became an inseparable component of the work of art itself, whether or not this was devised by the artist or curator as a practical solution to the challenge of making the work of art publicly perceptible. In this way, the production of the work of art and its mediation in a public exhibition context were intertwined. In an unpublished essay from 1968, Siegelaub stated that, by the late 1950 and early 1960s 'The contention that the framing convention of a work of art was implicit was accepted *a priori* by the majority...' of artists, with 'the role of the art as object ignoring, in this acceptance of logical art history progression, the implication of the object and its relation to its physical context (walls, floors, ceilings, and the room itself).'[76] In the same year, Dan Graham also noted that 'The show is done for a specific place'[77] further highlighting an understanding of the place of exhibition and the place of the work of art as inextricable.

The persons responsible for providing the mediating context of art were, therefore, almost as central to the production of art for an exhibition as the artists themselves. At

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[73] Ibid. p. 118-120.

[74] Ibid. p. 56. Siegelaub in an audio interview with Elayne Varian, June 1969, stored in Finch College Museum of Art Papers, Archives of American Art, Washington.

[75] Ibid. p. 56.

[76] Ibid. p. 18.

[77] Dan Graham cited in Alberro, Alexander. Ibid. p. 20.

the same time, artists were not only looking for sympathetic exhibition organisers, who could provide ways in which their dematerialised work could be shown, but also for those who had a fundamental understanding of what actually constituted the work of art and its exhibition. As artist Lawrence Weiner stated:

> [Curators] built their structure on being able to legitimately and correctly, which meant understanding, show a certain body of work that did not have a precedent. At least in my own case, I know that for sure, and, in the majority of other cases, I felt that the artists were looking for curators who at least understood what they did. They didn't even have to agree with it; they just had to understand it so that, when it was presented, it wasn't misrepresented.[78]

In response to what Peter Osborne isolated as the four key elements negated by conceptual art practice of the 1960s – art's *material objectivity*, *medium specificity*, *visuality*, and its *autonomy* – curators conjured new ways of making exhibitions which attempted to resolve how such conceptual and dematerialised practices could be presented, while providing a more visible curatorial structure for the work of art to show itself.[79] In the late 1960s, there were many exhibition moments in which the artwork (that which is made for presentation by an artist), the curatorial structure (the principal system or organisational framework for which this artwork is made), the techniques of mediation (the methods or sets of procedures employed so that the work is communicated apart from, but not excluding, the exhibition form) and the exhibition format (the type of presentation in which these relations are made manifest to a public) collapsed into one another.

An example of such a project is Siegelaub and Jack Wendler's *Xerox Book*, 1968, in which the artists – Carl Andre, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth, Sol LeWitt, Lawrence Weiner and Robert Morris – made works that responded to, and were confined by, dimensions (a sheet of letter-sized paper), medium (photocopies in a book) and instructions (work that could be copied by the curator).[80] Similarly, Siegelaub's publicity campaigns for exhibitions mirrored the works of art in them, and vice versa. His advertisements in *Artforum* to promote 'Douglas Huebler: November 1968', applied

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[78] Weiner, Lawrence. Interview with the author, New York, 08/11/05, p. 1. See Appendix One: WE.

[79] See Osborne, Peter. *Conceptual Art (Themes and Movements)*, op. cit.

[80] Siegelaub asked each artist to supply a twenty-five page piece, on standard 8 1/2 x 11 inch paper, to be reproduced seriographically.

exactly the same type of descriptive language that Huebler integrated into his work[81] and earlier, in 1967, Brian O'Doherty's 'Aspen 5+6', an exhibition that included films, audio, vinyl records and printed matter – by John Cage, Marcel Duchamp, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris and others – assembled together to fit inside a box alongside commissioned texts by Samuel Beckett, Rob Grillé, Susan Sontag and Roland Barthes.[82] Differentiation, between who and what, was involved in the production of art and who, and what, was responsible for its mediation was no longer so clearly demarcated or so easily defined. What Harald Szeemann called 'the great balancing act' between illustrating the curatorial concept and 'preserving the autonomy of the artworks'[83] was, by 1972, entering a key transitional moment in what Beatrice von Bismarck later called the 'change of heroes or roles in the art world from the personality of the artist to that of the curator.'[84]

With relation to what Jack Burnham called 'The emergence of a "post-formalist aesthetic,"'[85] the role of the exhibition-maker was transformed, in the late 1960s, from an activity primarily involved with organising exhibitions of discrete artworks, to a practice that extended its remit to include 'the curatorial'. Irit Rogoff more recently

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[81] The advertisement read, 'This 1/4page advertisement (4 1/2" x 4 3/4"), appearing in the November 1968 issue of *Artforum* magazine, on page 8, in the lower left corner, is one form of documentation for the November 1968 exhibition of Douglas Huebler, Seth Siegelaub, 1100 Madison Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10028.' See Alberro, Alexander. op. cit. p. 131.

[82] In my interview with O'Doherty, he described 'Aspen 5 + 6' as:

> ...the first conceptual exhibition outside a museum. The first conceptual exhibition is generally given to Mel Bochner, a few months before that, in which he got artists' notebooks and he exhibited them at, I think it was the New School, or the School of Visual Arts – one of these places; it's in the history books – and Alex Alberro was the historian of conceptualism here. And the thing I did...it's worth looking up, there's a fair bit of literature about it, because I went around with my little tape recorder and I produced this box – in a way it was a cube – and in it were records, films, texts of my generation; I had Bochner and Sol LeWitt and Dan Graham, and myself, and had the first structure, my first structural plays, Sol's first serial piece...I got Susan Sontag to write on the 'The Aesthetics of Silence', I got Roland Barthes to write about 'The Death of the Author', Lucy Lippard mentioned it briefly in *Six Years*... she mentions it briefly, but not enough...I had John Cage in there...I even got texts from Rob Grillé, and texts from Beckett...

See O'Doherty, Brian. Interview with the author, New York, 10/11/05, p. 10. See Appendix One: OD. See online archive of contents of *Aspen* back issues at http://ww.ubu.com/aspen (accessed 10/10/06).

[83] Szeemann cited in Scharf, Friedhelm and Schirmer, Gisela. 'Off the Wall: Artists' Refusals and Rejections: A History of Conflict', *50 Years documenta 1955-2005: Archive in Motion: Documenta Manual*, Eds. Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (Kassel and Göttingen, Kunsthalle Fridericianum Kassel and Steidl, 2005), p. 120. The quotation is the authors' translation into English, from Szeemann's original statement, published in German in his text, Szeemann, Harald. 'Einführungsvortrag', *Wiedervorlage d5*, Eds. Heike Radeck, Friedhelm Scharf and Karin Stengel, (Hofgeismar, 2002), p. 21.

[84] Beatrice von Bismarck cited in Scharf and Schirmer. op. cit. p. 120. Von Bismarck's position was originally published in Von Bismarck, Beatrice. 'Die Meister der Werke: Daniel Buren's Beitrag zur documenta 5 in Kassel 1972', *Jenseits der Grenzen: Französische und deutche Kunst vom Ancien Régime bis zur Gegenwart*, Eds. Uwe Fleckner, Martin Schieder and Michael F. Zimmermann (Cologne, Bd.III, 2000) pp. 222-23. Von Bismarck relies heavily on a previous text by Walter Grasskamp. See Grasskamp, Walter. 'Modell documenta oder wie wird Kunstgeschichte gemacht', *Kunstforum International*, No. 49, (April/May, 1982), pp. 15-22.

[85] See Burnham, Jack. 'Systems Esthetics', *Artforum*, Vol. 7, No.1, (September, 1968), pp. 30-35.

called this 'the possibility of framing those exhibition-making activities through [a] series of principles and possibilities.'[86] Emphasis upon the framing and mediation of art, rather than its production, not only indicated a response to changes in art praxis during the late 1960s, but also created a new degree of visibility for the individual agency involved in the framing of these practices i.e. the curator.

There was a new mode of practice, or what Raymond Williams called 'emergent' practice, as a cultural activity that developed with the inherent 'internal dynamic relations of any actual process', as curators attempted to find novel ways of producing exhibitions, with meanings and values that were 'substantially alternative or oppositional' to the dominant and hegemonic practices of exhibition-making at the time.[87] Such praxis, I will argue, now operates as a 'residual' element of contemporary curatorial discourse in that it 'relates to earlier social formations and phases of the cultural process, in which certain meanings and values were generated'[88] and there is a contemporary reaching-back to those meanings and values 'which still seem to have significance because they represent areas of human experience, aspiration, and achievement which dominant culture neglects, undervalues, opposes, represses, or even cannot recognise.'[89]

Curating – as a cultural practice that was once associated primarily with the selection of works for display purposes, usually in the context of a gallery or museum – emerged in the late 1960s as a creative form of mediation (and production) that was orientated

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[86] Rogoff, Irit. 'Smuggling – A Curatorial Model', *Under Construction: Perspectives on Institutional Practice*, (Cologne, Walther König, 2006), p. 132. For Rogoff, 'In the realm of "the curatorial" we see various principles that might not be associated with displaying works of art; principles of the production of knowledge, of activism, of cultural circulations and translations that begin to shape and determine other forms by which arts can engage.'

[87] See definitions of 'Dominant', 'Residual' and 'Emergent', in Williams, Raymond. 'Dominant, Residual, and Emergent', *Marxism and Literature*, (Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 1986 [originally 1977]), pp. 121-126. For Williams, 'Residual' cultural elements usually operate at some distance from effective dominant culture, while forming part of it, particularly if they come from a major area of the past and have been incorporated into the dominant culture in order to make sense. He argues that this incorporation of the 'residual' through 'reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion' is the work of selective tradition, giving the example of 'the literary tradition' which, having already passed through this selection process, has incorporated the 'residual' into definitions of what literature now is and should be. Even in opposition to what literature is and should be, that is, against the pressures of incorporation, 'actively residual meanings and values are sustained'; whereas, 'emergent' describes new practices with new meanings, values and kinds of relationships that are continually being created. Truly 'emergent' practices, Williams argues, are difficult to distinguish from those that are elements of new phases in the dominant culture and merely 'novel'. Those that are substantially oppositional to the dominant culture are emergent in the 'strict sense' as real alternatives. What, for Williams, matters in understanding 'emergent culture', as distinct from 'residual' or 'dominant' culture, is that it is never only a matter of 'immediate practice' and it will always depend crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form.

[88] Ibid. p. 123.

[89] Ibid. pp. 123-124.

towards an individual, semi-autonomous and singly-authored curatorial practice. By the time Harald Szeemann curated 'Documenta 5: Questioning Reality, Pictorial Worlds Today' in 1972, the position of the individual curator had already opened up to wider international debate. This was accompanied by a shift of emphasis in the criticism of art, away from a primary critique of the artwork as an autonomous object of study, towards a mode of what I would call *curatorial criticism* in which the curator becomes a central subject of critique. The critical response to 'Documenta 5', for example, focused on Szeemann's over-emphasis of his own curatorial concept rather than the artworks in the exhibition. At the time, criticism was led by a group of exhibiting artists – Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Barry La Va, Sol LeWitt, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, and Robert Smithson[90] – who petitioned their protest in *Artforum*,[91] simultaneously published in other places including the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.[92] These artists were against being 'exhibited in thematic classification'[93] without their permission, and were opposed to Szeemann's application of an overarching 'theme concept' to selected artworks according to the categories of 'Questioning Reality' and 'Pictorial Worlds Today' in an exhibition which also included non-art materials – such as pornography, science fiction, comics, political propaganda posters and advertisements – alongside the artworks.[94] As Beatrice von Bismarck later argued, the petition, signed by the artists, addressed a fundamental conflict of power relations in the art world, whereby:

> The manifesto, signed by ten American artists, which was published in *Artforum* to coincide with the exhibition's opening, should be seen as a reaction against a role change. In it, the signers stated their views on recent exhibition practice and concretely that of documenta 5. They demanded the right to determine whether, and where, they would exhibit and the appearance of their pages in the catalogue. What was at issue in this contest was the power to shape the public appearance of art.[95]

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[90] Five of the artists – Hans Haacke, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Dorothea Rockburne, and Richard Serra – exhibited at Documenta 5 despite their protest, whereas the other five withdrew from the exhibition.

[91] The manifesto was published in *Artforum*, (June, 1972) and signed by Carl Andre, Hans Haacke, Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt, Barry Le Va, Robert Morris, Dorothea Rockburne, Fred Sandback, Richard Serra, Robert Smithson. See *Challenging Art: Artforum 1962-1974*, Ed. Amy Newman (New York, Soho Press, 2000), p. 518 and pp. 349-54.

[92] See Grasskamp, Walter. op. cit. pp. 15-22.

[93] See Müller, Hans-Joachim. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2005), p. 42.

[94] Ibid. pp. 42-43.

[95] Beatrice von Bismarck cited in Scharf and Schirmer. op. cit. p. 122. See also Von Bismarck, Beatrice. 'Die Meister der Werke: Daniel Buren's Beitrag zur documenta 5 in Kassel 1972', op. cit. pp. 222-23.

The idea of an exhibition of art as a 'curated' space made it apparent that there was a curatorial remit operating outside the interests of the artists. This opened up a space of critical contestation which extended beyond a centralised critique of works of art – which, ironically, increasingly concerned themselves with mediation and the language of mediation as I have already outlined – and began to address the curated exhibition as an entity. In this sense, the emergence of the curatorial position that began with the process of demystification in the 1960s – as an opposition to the dominant order of what, and who, constituted the work of art – became a discussion about the work of an exhibition, its meanings and values.

1.3: The Curator as Author of Exhibitions in the Late 1980s

The visibility of the role of curator, which began with the demystification process would, by the late 1980s, enable a 're-mystification' of the curatorial role as a dominant, single-*auteur* position. Critiques of the group exhibition form began to portray the exhibition as a presentation medium with a subjective, narrative thread produced by a curator's juxtaposition of artworks. Curating in the context of the 1980s often meant a return to the inclusion of pre-existing objects or the grouping-together of both extant and commissioned works as part of an overall exhibition composition. The a-historical or thematic exhibitions of the 1980s often proposed that the primary function of the curator was as an agent almost solely responsible for the authorship of an exhibition's concept, where the exhibition was proposed as a synthesis of works of art, concepts and praxis transformed into a *Gesamtkunstwerk* (the total synthesis of works of art into one whole form) by an individual.[96] Alongside well-documented challenges to the traditional museum in the 1980s,[97] a new rhetoric prevailed which articulated

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[96] The notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* was taken from Wagner's amalgamation of poetry, dance and music as a shaping of life in opposition to art, in a text published in 1849 as 'Das Kunstwerk der Zukunft.' The English translation is published as 'The Artwork of the Future', *Richard Wagner Prose Works* (8 Volumes), trans. William Ashton Ellis (New York, Broude Brothers, 1966). He stated that 'The artwork of the future is a joint artwork, and it can only emerge from a joint desire.' Cited from Müller, Hans-Joachim. op. cit. p. 78. For a more detailed examination of the term 'Gesamtkunstwerk', published in English, see Roberts, David. 'The Total Work of Art', *Thesis Eleven*, No. 83, (November, 2005), pp. 105-121.

[97] The modern art museum had already come under much scrutiny by numerous neo-avant-garde artists, between the late 1950s and 1970s, who sought a more concrete space for the manifestation of art as something that went beyond its own objectivity, into environments by Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg, into more experiential, process-led performance events like the 'happenings' of Fluxus, by Joseph Beuys, Yves Klein, and Piero Manzoni or artists linked to Italian Arte Povera from the 1950s, into the information-based practices of conceptual artists such as Robert Barry, Douglas Heubler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner in the 1960s, to later museum interventions and the situational, post-studio practices of the 1970s, particularly the works of Michael Asher, Marcel Broodthaers, Daniel Buren and Hans Haacke where, according to Jean-Marc Poinsot, 'The exhibition as support for aesthetic experience tended to transform the gallery or museum into an extension of the studio, establishing communications with an audience which considered a mediator's intervention undesirable if it wasn't at the production stage.' See Poinsot, Jean-Marc 'Large Exhibitions A Sketch of a Topology', Greenberg et al. op. cit. pp. 39-66. In the 1980s, numerous

contemporary curating as the activity that shaped exhibitions and gave meaning to the displayed artwork. For example, in 1982, the director of 'Documenta 7', Rudi Fuchs, summarised his art of exhibition-making: 'We practice this wonderful craft... we construct an exhibition after having made rooms for this exhibition. In the meantime artists attempt to do their best, as it should be.'[98] By 1983, Harald Szeemann curated 'Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk' [Penchant for a Synthesis of the Arts] at Kunsthaus Zürich, which proposed the exhibition as a quest for the total synthesis of the arts through the imagination of the curator. He later stated, in an interview with fellow curator Hans Ulrich Obrist:

> ...needless to say a Gesamtkunstwerk can only exist in the imagination. In this exhibition, I started with German Romantic artists like Runge, a contemporary of Novalis and Caspar David Friedrich... then I included works and documents relating to major cultural figures like Richard Wagner and Ludwig II; Rudolf Steiner and Wassily Kandinsky; Facteur Cheval and Tatlin... Schwitters' Cathedral of Erotic Misery; the Bauhaus manifesto 'Let's build the cathedral of our times'; Antoni Gaudí and the Glass Chain movement; Antonin Artaud, Adolf Wolfli, and Gabriele D'Annunzio... in cinema Abel Gance and Hans Jürgen Syberberg. Once again it was a history of utopias. In the center of the exhibition was a small space with what I would call the primary artistic gestures of our century: a Kandinsky of 1911, Duchamp's *Large Glass*, a Mondrian, and a Malevich. I ended the show with Beuys as the representative of the last revolution in the visual arts.[99]

Szeemann's exhibition was one of many large-scale exhibitions in the 1980s that created complex interstices between art from different times, movements, media and styles, where the overall results were purported as a unified work, made from a combination of numerous artworks, displayed together under a single vision. 'Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk' proposed a self-styled curatorial value system. As a proposition, Szeemann's exhibition treated 'myth as a value', with its own perpetual alibi that is without truth. Like a two-faced Janus, its 'meaning is always there to present the form' – which, in Szeemann's exhibition would be the works and objects exhibited – and

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texts and publications dealt with the transformation of museums, their collections and conventions, primarily linked to postcolonial and/or postmodern approaches to museology and modern museum studies which emerged in the 1980s and early 1990s. Many based their critique on the Western Modernist notion of the museum as an absolute purveyor of historical knowledge including, most notably, Bennett, Tony. *The Birth of the Museum – History, Theory, Politics*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), Clifford, James. 'On Collecting Art & Culture', *Out There: Marginalisation and Contemporary Cultures*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1990); *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge*, Ed Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (London and New York, Routledge, 1992); *Museum Culture. Histories, Discourses, Spectacle*, Eds Daniel J Sherman and Irit Rogoff (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 1994); *The New Museology*, Ed Peter Vergo (London, Reaktion Books, 1989), and Weil, Stephen E. *Rethinking the Museum*, (Washington DC, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1990).

[98] Fuchs, Rudi 'Introduction', *Documenta 7*, Vol 1, (Kassel, documenta GmbH, 1982), p. vii.

[99] See Obrist, Hans Ulrich 'Mind Over Matter An Interview with Harald Szeemann', *Artforum*, (November 1996). See http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_n3_v35/ai_18963443 (accessed 10/07/06).

where 'the form is always there to distance the meaning of the many studies which cannot exhaust the meaning enough.'[100] Both the sheer scale and density of potential meanings, produced by the arrangement of various works encoded in such an exhibition, transform the aesthetic values of the individual artworks into symbolic values, where Szeemann's overtly subjective decisions reconstitute the system through which any value can be adjudged, by placing responsibility for them almost fully with the curator.[101] The a-historical, large-scale exhibitions of the 1980s began to foreground the idea that the significance of the individual artwork was determined by the place it was assigned amongst, and alongside, other works. Exhibitions such as Szeemann's 'A-Historische Klanken' (A-Historical Sounds) at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam in 1988, Jean-Hubert Martin's 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' (Magicians of the Earth), at Centre Georges Pompidou and La Vilette in Paris in 1989, as well as Rudi Fuchs' 1983 re-hang of the van Abbemuseum collection in Eindhoven, were all notable for their juxtapositions of works that differed considerably from each other in terms of materials, style, time and cultural origin.. Whereas radical re-hangs of permanent collections are now institutional modes of practice in museums such as Tate Modern,[102] Fuchs' approach was notable for its 'confrontations,' like his placement of Marc Chagall's *Homage to Apollinaire* (1912) next to Luciano Fabro's *The Judgement of Paris* (1979), in a break with conventional art historical classifications of style or period. At the time, Fuchs justified such contentious proximities on the basis of their thematic affinities: 'Fabro gives prominence to an item of Greek mythology which has continued to operate over the centuries. Chagall has a Russian background, but that is connected with a basic story too. They are both concerned with things in life, the charged nature of history.'[103]

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[100] Roland Barthes cited in Poinsot, Jean-Marc. op.cit, p. 57. See Barthes, Roland. *Mythologies*, (Paris, Seuil, 1970), p. 209.

[101] See Poinsot, Jean-Marc. op. cit. pp. 56-58. Large-scale exhibitions of the 1980s also explored spaces beyond the gallery or museum, such as Kasper König's 'Von Hier Aus' (Düsseldorf, 1985), displayed in purpose-built exhibition halls conceived with architect Hermann Czech, or even employing a single city as the exhibition space, such as Jan Höet's exhibition of some fifty artists in one or more rooms in various private apartments as 'Chambres d'Amis' (Ghent, 1986), or Klaus Bussmann and Kasper König's initiative of showing art in outdoor places throughout a single city in the first 'Skulptur Projekt Münster' in 1987 and, shortly afterwards, Mary Jane Jacob's specially-commissioned temporary public artworks that responded to their local, spatial and site context in 'Places with a Past: New Site-Specific Art at Charleston's Spoleto Festival' in 1991. See Lamoureux, Johanne. 'The Museum Flat', Greenberg et al. op. cit. in which she examines these exhibitions comparatively and in detail.

[102] When Tate Modern opened, in 2003, it eschewed a hanging of its collection according to chronology and, instead, hung selected works according to the following themes, in four separate suites of galleries, each taking as its starting point a traditional artistic genre: Landscape/Matter/Environment, Still-Life/Object/Real Life, History/Memory/Society and Nude/Action/Body. See www.tate.org.uk

[103] Rudi Fuchs cited from a 1983 interview in Meijers, Debora J. 'The Museum and the A-historical Exhibition', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 13.

A-historical exhibitions rejected any chronological arrangement of works and instead juxtaposed works from different times, places and cultures on the basis of their formal, thematic or contextual relationships. What these exhibitions had in common was a grouping-together of diverse works, presented as if in mutual dialogue with one another, and mediated as a personal narrative proffered by a single author-curator. Taxonomic systems, linked to museum displays, were substituted with subjective forms of taxonomic 'essentialism', mainly predicated on the curator's taste, style and the affinities they set up between the exhibited works.[104] As Debora J. Meijers argued, 'The works of art are arranged on the basis of new truths which are presented as universals, despite their strong personal colouring.'[105] In its new sense, curating was referred to as the selecting and cataloguing of artists for exhibition, generally in a public space, gallery or museum, where the artworks were organised according to the curator's subjective preferences. The curator was presented as an 'arbiter of taste,' where the justification for their selection of a coterie of artists was seen as an intuitive choice that fulfilled the function of 'guaranteeing their omnipotence.'[106] As Liam Gillick wrote in 1992, the act of curating functions 'to create a set of mediating factors between the artist and others, allowing the possibility of viewing the artists' work within applied distancing and of contextualising structures beyond yet in reality alongside market forces and the private gallery...'[107]

The figure of the contemporary art curator within such exhibitions became increasingly visible, paralleled by an equal level of critical scrutiny towards what was considered to be an over-riding curatorial bias, at the expense of the autonomy of the artworks on

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[104] Ibid. p. 19.

[105] Ibid. p. 19.

[106] Ibid. p. 10.

[107] Gillick, Liam. 'The Bible, The Complete Works of Shakespeare and a Luxury Item', *Meta 2: A New Spirit in Curating*, Ed. Ute Meta Bauer, (Stuttgart, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 1992), pp. 5-10. Aside from a handful of practicing curators in the 1980s – such as Rudi Fuchs, Jan Höet, Jean Hubert-Martin, Kasper König and Harald Szeemann in Europe or Tricia Collins and Richard Milazzo in the US – it was not until the 1990s that curatorial practice established itself in the foreground of contemporary art practice. Such practice no longer focused on the functional aspect of the curatorial profession but on curating as a creative activity akin to artistic production. The1990s brought an unparalleled level of visibility to a whole generation of curators such as Daniel Birnbaum, Saskia Bos, Nicolas Bourriaud, Dan Cameron, Lynne Cooke, Catherine David, Bart de Baere, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Matthew Higgs, Hou Hanru, Mary Jane Jacob, Ute Meta Bauer, Jeremy Millar, Robert Nickas, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Nicolaus Schafhausen, Eric Troncy and Barbara Vanderlinden, some of whom had begun practising towards the latter part of the 1980s. Since the late 1990s, a new generation has come to the fore, many of whom have studied on postgraduate curatorial programmes – including Carlos Basualdo, Barnaby Drabble, Annie Fletcher, Maria Hlavajova, Jens Hoffmann, Maria Lind, Emily Pethick, Polly Staple, Adam Szymczyk and Grant Watson amongst others – many of whom I have interviewed as part of my research process.

display. Post-Modern arrangements, in which works from different cultural contexts were shown together as part of an a-historical narrative, came under much critical assault for what Patrick Murphy (curator of Philadelphia's Institute for Contemporary Art in the 1990s) called 'stay at home cultural tourism' – i.e. presenting art from many other different places as if they were all the same, with 'artistic artefacts [being] paraded through the galleries, the very range of origins providing the meaning'.[108] The most visible person within the a-historical exhibition inevitably becomes the curator, as individual artworks are reduced to the raw materials that make up the curator's exhibition. According to Debora J. Meijers, the individual works acquire a role in the communication of a message and, at the centre of these exhibitions is a kind of exhibition-designer 'turned artist.'[109]

The notion of the curator, as a constructor of 'new unities' and 'new truths' presented as universals, has received considerable criticism, but what such critique makes apparent is that provision is being made for the activity of curating as creative authorship.[110] As Meijers proposes, 'An exhibition designer who regards his activity as art is not essentially different from the historian who becomes increasingly aware of the literary dimension of his historical account.'[111] As Robert Barry pre-empted in the 1960s, in relation to the way in which the word 'art' was used, there has been a paradigmatic shift of emphasis away from the application of the noun 'curator' linked to a traditional museum function, towards the use of the verb 'curating', in relation to a practice of constructing narratives through 'correspondences' between artworks.[112] In 2003, Alex Farquharson pointed out that the appearance of the verb 'to curate' – where once there was just the noun, 'curator' – indicates the growth and vitality of curatorial discussion since the 1990s, which has regularly led to curating being articulated as an active participation in the processes of artistic production through diverse forms of exhibition-

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[108] Murphy, Patrick. 'Spiralling Open', *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*, Ed. Mika Hannula (Helsinki, NIFCA, 1998), p. 187.

[109] Meijers, Debora J. 'The Museum and the A-historical Exhibition', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 14.

[110] Meijers, Debora J. op. cit. p. 18.

[111] Ibid. p. 18.

[112] Ibid. p. 19. In the 1990s, exhibitions by artists working within museum collections became commonplace as a means of contesting museological histories, such as Joseph Kosuth's 'The Play of the Unmentionable' (Brooklyn Museum, New York, 1990) or Fred Wilson's 'Mining The Museum' (Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, 1992) and, later on, Hans Haacke's 'Viewing Matters' (Museum Boijmans van Beuningen, 1996). See Kosuth, Joseph. *Play of the Unmentionable: An Installation by Joseph Kosuth at the Brooklyn Museum*, (New York, The New Press and The Brooklyn Museum, 1992). For an overview of Fred Wilson's 'Mining the Museum' see Karp, Ivan. 'Constructing the Spectacle of Culture', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 267.

making and curatorial projects.[113] Farquharson writes 'new words, after all, especially ones as grammatically bastardised as the verb "to curate" (worse still the adjective "curatorial"), emerge from a linguistic community's persistent need to identify a point of discussion.'[114]

Key mobilisations during the late 1980s saw the amplification of the notion of the curator as an agent responsible for overall exhibition structure and narrative, and the now-ubiquitous usage of 'curated by' (in the context of exhibition invitations, press releases and catalogues) being established. As a normative attribute to all exhibitions by the late 1980s, 'curated by' articulated a semi-autonomous role for the curator, with a self-defined position within the production and mediation of an exhibition. Curating in the context of group exhibitions – the exhibition form that most clearly brought the curator to the fore and helped to establish the 'curated by' credential – made evident the idea that there is an agency other than the artist at work within all exhibitions, and that the exhibition is a form of curatorial language.[115] As Nicolas Bourriaud stated, 'the development of this idea of the group exhibition as a language and of course then, indirectly, the bigger and the more important aspects in any exhibition, even a solo show, is [now] decoded in the same way' as the curatorial language of a group exhibition.[116]

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[113] Farquharson, Alex. 'I Curate, You Curate, We Curate...' *Art Monthly*, No. 269, (September, 2003), pp. 7-10.

[114] Ibid. p. 8.

[115] For a development of the vocabulary surrounding curatorial practice, see the selection of essays written from the 1990s to the present in *MIB – Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice*, Eds. Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler and Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2004).

[116] Bourriaud, Nicolas. Interview with the author, Paris, 27/01/04, p. 8. See Appendix One: BO.

1.4: From Demystification to Super-Visibility of the Curator in the 1990s

As I have already stated, it is not my intention to compile a linear evolution of curatorial practice. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the late 1960s and the late 1980s may be regarded as moments of conjuncture in extending the boundaries of what constituted the role of the curator and the nexus of curatorial praxis. Beyond the parameters of a fixed institutional post, there were expanded possibilities for what encompassed the curatorial and its potential presentation form.

If the 1960s saw the first significant steps being made towards demystifying the mediator's role – through new exhibition formats, such as publicly-sited exhibitions, art magazines, publications, or transient events – the 1980s saw a second paradigm shift, exemplified by a return to curating with discrete objects. While linked to curating art museum collections, this latter development differed substantially from those that had already taken place, by being considered part of an individual curatorial language, which allocated a theme or single concept to be applied to an exhibition in a break with historical conventions of display. What these conjunctures have in common is the degree to which the curator became prominent, as both the subject and object of study, within discussions and debates surrounding the exhibition of art.

The visibility of the curatorial position in art discourse, and what Mick Wilson calls 'the discursive turn'[117] towards curating in the 1990s, also meant that any retrospective attempts at historicising art practices from the late 1960s began to prioritise an expanded historical position for certain individual curators. For example, Blake Stimson's 1999 preface to *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology* states that 'Seth Siegelaub, the organiser-entrepreneur... was, perhaps, the single most influential figure associated with the [Conceptual Art] movement'[118] and a vast number of articles lay claim to Harald Szeemann's 'patriarchal status at the centre of a pool of curatorial talent that has shaped the general perception of experimental art in the post-war era.'[119] As already outlined,

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[117] Wilson, Mick. 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit.

[118] Stimson, Blake. 'The Promise of Conceptual Art', *Conceptual Art: A Critical Anthology*, Eds. Alexander Alberro and Blake Stimson (Cambridge, MA and London, MIT Press, 1999), pp. xxxvii-lii. See also Alberro, Alexander. *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*, op. cit., which presented a history of Siegelaub's curatorial practice up to 1972.

[119] Harald Szeemann or Robert Storr? Taken from an interview with Harald Szeemann: Storr, Robert. 'Prince of Tides', *Artforum*, Vol. XXVII, No. 9 (May, 1999), see

burgeoning cultural recognition for the role played by the organiser, mediator and intermediary in the conceptualisation, production and mediation of contemporary art exhibitions was, in part, a response to the changing conditions under which art was being produced. But it was also an attempt to question such conditions by devising new formats through which artists could present their work as publicly-available information. As Siegelaub stated of his working relationship with artists Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner:

> My interests were very closely allied to working with them to devise exhibition structures and conditions that were able to show their work, which would reflect what their work was about. In other words, it became clear to me that, [in seeking a] solution to the problems that were posed by the nature of their work and the ideas behind it... a gallery was not necessarily the most ideal environment to show it... my "job," so to speak, was to find those formats, to find those new structures and conditions to be able to show their work.[120]

This change, in what constituted 'the mediator', proposed the curator as a proactive agent in the communication chain (artist as sender, curator as mediator, viewer as receiver) and as someone primarily responsible for the production of the means (exhibition formats) through which forms of information (artworks, curatorial ideas) were mobilised. As Gilles Deleuze identified, in his view of creativity as a movement or flow, the mediator appears at the core of such movements, as a necessary intermediary to keep things open and alive as part of an active communication network:

> Creation is all about mediators. Without them nothing happens. They can be people – for a philosopher, artists or scientists; for a scientist, philosophers or artists – but things too, even plants or animals...Whether they are real or imaginary, animate or inanimate, you have to form your mediators. It's a series. If you're not in some series, even a completely imaginary one, you're lost. I need my mediators to express myself and they'd never express themselves without me: you're always working in a group, even when you seem to be on your own.[121]

If, as Deleuze suggests, the role of the mediator is to keep things moving, as a series of 'animations' or 'expressions' as part of a group, then demystification, as a way of

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http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0268/is_9_37/ai_54772288 (accessed 21/08/06). See also, in particular, Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'Mind Over Matter: An Interview with Harald Szeemann', op. cit. and almost all of my interviews with curators, especially those with Siegelaub, Obrist, Storr, and Maria Lind.

[120] Siegelaub, Seth. Interview with the author, Amsterdam, 27/07/04, pp. 1. See Appendix One: SI.

[121] Deleuze, Gilles. 'Mediators', *Negotiations 1972-1990*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 125. See also a recent analysis of the cultural understanding of the contemporary curator and the figure of the mediator in Andreasen, Søren and Bang Larsen, Lars. 'The Middleman: Beginning to Think About Mediation', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit.

making visible these mediations, seems to be the necessary function of such movements, animations, or practices. As a radical force in the transformation of curatorial practice in the late 1960s, demystification as a trope within curatorial discussions now operates as what Raymond Williams called an 'actively residual element,'[122] whereby an idea that was originally formed as an oppositional force to the mystification of the artistic process has now been assimilated into the dominant culture, with its meanings and values sustained in the present. It has even become a primary practice for some, such as Brian O'Doherty, whereby 'demystification is a medium in which we currently work...'[123] Rather than yielding a sustainable process of demystification – as a critique of hidden institutional power structures or the power of the institutionalised (museum) curator in providing a level of prestige for artists – demystification has effectively been incorporated, reinterpreted and diluted as 'visibility' for the curatorial position. As an actively residual element within contemporary curatorial discourse, the curatorial position of the late 1960s, while 'effectively formed and generated in the past... is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present.'[124]

Demystification is now widely accepted within curatorial discourse as a method of defining and representing a curatorial position, centred on implicit ideas of authorship, self-positioning and the creative value of the curator within the social and cultural field of art. Charles Esche's articulation of his position demonstrates this:

> I think we should admit to a real creativity implicit in this new term of curator... Now we're involved in production and the creation of contexts and opportunities, all of which have a creative element... a curator has a position... I have my own position. Like, if you want a building like Rem Koolhaas, you ask for Rem Koolhaas.[125]

This is reiterated in Robert Storr's statement on his own curatorial position:

> I think the demystification is a crucial part. Now there are different ways of doing it, and there are different opportunities or moments for it... If you work in institutions, you're in a somewhat different situation inasmuch as your best bet, basically, is to

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[122] Williams, Raymond. op. cit. pp. 121-123.

[123] O'Doherty, Brian. Interview with the author, New York, 10/11/05, p. 10. See Appendix One: OD.

[124] Williams, Raymond. op. cit. p.122.

[125] Esche, Charles. op. cit. pp. 90-96.

> create the maximum transparency, and then be as candid as possible about the places where opacity is necessary.[126]

As the main repercussion from a period of transformation around what constitutes the work of art and its mediation, the demystification of the role of the curator – originally advocated by Siegelaub as a general essentialism for the mediation of art – now seems to lie, paradoxically, somewhere between notions of opportunity for maximum transparency – as a means of articulating and defining a specific position for the curator – and what Annie Fletcher calls a level of mediated 'super-visibility.'[127] A product of the demystification of the curator's function, super-visibility seems to have emerged from that which was initially intended as a critique of the autonomy of the artistic position and of the institutionalised exhibition space (the 'white cube' or museum as arbiters of aesthetic, artistic, and historical value). I would argue that one of the byproducts of this move towards curatorial transparency has been the subsequent re-mystification of the curator as a:

> ... dominant power [that] may legitimate itself by promoting beliefs and values congenial to it; naturalizing and universalizing such beliefs so as to render them self-evident and apparently inevitable; denigrating ideas which might challenge it; excluding rival forms of thought, perhaps by some unspoken but systematic logic; and obscuring social reality in ways convenient to itself. Such 'mystification,' as it is commonly known, frequently takes the form of masking...[128]

This masking, of certain denigrating ideas, functions in a similar way to Roland Barthes' understanding of how 'myth' operates, as a social and cultural construction which is passed off as natural, where certain relations to power are obscured, or glossed over, and where references to tensions and difficulties are blocked out, with their threat defused as part of a naturalisation process.[129] Barthes wrote of myth as a 'type of speech' in which 'everything can be myth provided it is conveyed by a discourse.'[130] If demystification of the contemporary curatorial role remains primarily linked to

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[126] Storr, Robert. Interview with the author, Brooklyn, 30/03/05, pp. 15-16. See Appendix One: ST.

[127] Fletcher, Annie. Interview with the author, Amsterdam, 20/09/05, p. 5. See Appendix One: FL.

[128] Eagleton, Terry. *Ideology: An Introduction*, (London, Verso, 1991), pp. 5-6.

[129] Barthes, Roland. 'Myth Today', *A Barthes Reader*, (London, Vintage, 2000 [first published in 1956]), p. 103. A key illustration of this lies in Barthes' example of how the 'signification' of an image in *Paris-Match*, of a 'young Negro in a French uniform' saluting the French tricolour, as an image of the great French empire, also covers over many factors that produced such a myth, such as the history of the colonised which is, for Barthes, already built into the meaning of the myth itself: 'The meaning is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions.'

[130] Ibid. p. 93.

discursive issues, such as the transparency and opacity of decision-making processes in the context of exhibition-making, then there are many other issues that remain peripheral to current dominant discourses – issues of celebrity, individual earnings and economic advantage gained through the curating profession, career success for their artist friends and the influence of the art market on curatorial decisions, amongst others. Demystification of the role of the curator would seem to be counteracted by oppositional motives, such as Storr's judicious use of opacity in the face of increased transparency. This tension between 'self-explanation' and the need to retain 'complexity' in curatorial thinking is re-iterated by Andrew Renton:

> I am quite a strong believer that part of the job of curating is to make the show self-explanatory and people ask what that would be and I would say that what you have is not a catalogue that explained your work but actually the works explained each other and then you've really got an integrated exhibition. What demystification doesn't quite allow for is notions of complexity – and we live in an age where artworks do not conform to a single genre and are, by their inherent nature, complex – and... I'm quite interested in demystifying the process of experiencing art, but I'm interested in simultaneously retaining the possibility of complexity within that... [131]

Renton's statement appears to yearn for a certain mystique surrounding the experience of art, as a possible function of the complexity of art and curatorial decisions, such as the selection and juxtapositions of works. The idea that the art 'works explained each other' reinforces the notion of an abstract mediating faculty that is integral to art. Such a statement also carries with it a belief in the capacity of curatorial intent, whereby meaning is produced merely by virtue of a curator's decision to juxtapose certain works as a sufficient form of self-explanation.

For Annie Fletcher, there is a notable contradiction between a curator's stated remit – which now incorporates the process of demystification '...as an inherent part of the practice... to supply information, to be open, to demystify, to try and show, to be transparent...' – and the fact that curators are still so unresponsive to the effects that such visibility could have on the configuration of the powerful curator position within art and its related discourses. When considering the effects super-visibility has on how curating is represented, evaluated and institutionalised by discourses related to contemporary exhibition practices, Fletcher continues, 'Maybe the visibility of the curator, on another level, is something that should be questioned in terms of how super-

[131] Renton, Andrew. Interview with the author, London, 25/10/04, pp. 12. See Appendix One: RE.

visible they are and, rather, say that they should be made responsible, accountable...'[132] As Pierre Bourdieu demonstrated, in his analysis of social and cultural divisions being maintained by the process of evaluation (often unbeknown to those who are responsible for, and fulfilled by, these evaluations):

> Agents entrusted with acts of classification can fulfil their social function as social classifiers only because it is carried out in the guise of acts of academic classification. They only do well what they have to do (objectively) because they think they are doing something other than what they are doing, because they are doing something other than what they think they are doing, and because they believe in what they think they are doing. As fools fooled, they are the primary victims of their own actions.[133]

One of these actions has led to an interpretation of the political aspect of demystification as a position of super-visibility for the individual curatorial position, with little recourse to the effects that such a continued reiteration of this visibility may have on the creation and maintenance of a dominant discourse in art and its curatorship, based upon this visibility. There are many contradictions between the demystification of and making visible the curatorial position, as can be seen in many of the critical responses to curators' demystification initiatives. For example, 'Manifesta 4' in 2002, was declared by its curators – Iara Boubnova, Nuria Enguita Mayo and Stéphanie Moisdon – to be a curatorial system of 'radical transparency', with the intention of creating more organic processes centred on dialogue, exchange and new genre art models, with the co-curators assuming 'the role of facilitators rather than curator-superstars.'[134] But, by drawing attention to their alleged transparency, the curators guaranteed that discussion surrounding the exhibition focused primarily on their curatorial statement rather than the

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[132] Fletcher, Annie. Interview with the author, Amsterdam, 20/09/05, pp. 4-5. See Appendix One: FL.

[133] Bourdieu, Pierre. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*, (Cambridge, MA, Polity Press, 1996), p. 39.

[134] Cited from Snodgrass, Susan. 'Manifesta 4: Defining Europe?', *Art in America*, (January, 2003). See http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1248/is_1_91/ai_96126343 (accessed 10/12/06). See the Manifesta 4 website statement at http://www.manifesta.org/manifesta4 (accessed 10/12/06). Manifesta was a Dutch initiative for a nomadic pan-European biennial of contemporary art that relocates to a new European city every two years. It was initiatially conceived in response to dramatic political changes in Central and Eastern Europe, in the aftermath of the fall of the Berlin Wall (November 1989), and to the perceived inability of traditional large-scale events, such as Documenta and the Venice Biennale, to respond adequately to the new circumstances. See www.manifesta.org for a brief history by Henry Meyric Hughes. To date, 'Manifesta 1' (Rotterdam, 1996) was curated by Rosa Martinez, Viktor Masiano, Vasif Kortun, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Andrew Renton; 'Manifesta 2' (Luxembourg, 1998) was curated by Robert Fleck, Maria Lind and Barbara Vanderlinden; 'Manifesta 3' (Ljubljana, 2000) was curated by Francesco Bonami, Ole Bouman, Maria Hlavajová and Kathrin Rhomberg; 'Manifesta 4' (Frankfurt, 2002) was curated by Iara Boubnova, Nuria Enguita Mayo, and Stéphanie Moisdon; 'Manifesta 5' (San Sebastian, 2004) was curated by Marta Kuzma and Massimiliano Gioni, 'Manifesta 6' (Nicosia, 2006) was intended to be curated by Mai Abu ElDahab, Florian Waldvogel and Anton Vidokle, but was cancelled. For discussions on some of the reasons for this cancellation, please see www.manifesta.org

artworks they selected.[135] Similarly, when Francesco Bonami attempted to make the 2003 Venice Biennale a more collective exhibition project, by inviting eleven curators to curate 'zones' instead of a singly-authored exhibition,[136] reviews mainly focused on each of the individual curatorial statements and Bonami was even criticised for not curating the exhibition enough.[137] But the most prominent means through which this super-visibility has been maintained is in the formalisation of international gatherings of curators – such as conferences, symposia and related publications, anthologies and curatorial handbooks – which have become commonplace since the late 1990s. All these methods have assisted in creating and sustaining curator-centred discourse, as I will now outline in more detail.

1.5: Curatorial Anthologies and the Emergence of a History of Exhibitions

As an historical discourse and as an academic field of enquiry, curatorship remains to be fully established. In the 1990s, in the English-speaking world, one of the main distinctions from the preceding period was the emergence of publications specifically examining the history of exhibitions, curatorial innovations and models from the past and their potential links to an evolving practice. During this time, however, provision was made for discussions surrounding individual curators and a process of historicisation began to take shape at the same time as major transformations in contemporary curatorial praxis. As Helmut Draxler argued in 1992, the early 1990s were already being recognised as a period of 'institutionalisation' for the curator function, with the flourishing of curatorial training programmes following an initial 'institutional shift in the course of the sixties, which [came] from a certain uneasiness with respect to the inescapability of museums as well as other exhibition institutions to react to new forms of expression in art.'[138] What Draxler could not have foreseen was that the institutionalisation of the function of the curator was only the first stage in the emergence of a new contemporary curatorial discourse – and an accompanying

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[135] Ibid. See also Moisdon, Stéphanie. Interview with the author, Paris, 18/04/05, pp. 4-7. See Appendix One: MO.

[136] Bonami, Francesco. 'I Have a Dream', *50th Biennale di Venezia: Dreams and Conflicts – The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, Eds. Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa (Venice, Marsilio, 2003), p. xxi. The curators were Carlos Basualdo, Daniel Birnbaum, Catherine David, Massimiliano Gioni, Hou Hanru, Molly Nesbit, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Gabriel Orozco, Gilane Tawadros, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Igor Zabel. See also Griffin, Tim. 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', *Artforum*, Vol. XLII, No. 3 (November 2003), pp. 152-163.

[137] See Bonami's statements in 'Global Tendencies', op. cit. For reviews of the biennale see Griffin, Tim, Nochlin, Linda and Rothkopt, Scott. 'Pictures of an Exhibition', *Artforum* Vol. XLII, No. 1 (September, 2003), pp. 174-181.

[138] Draxler, Helmut. 'The Institutional Discourse', *Meta 2: A New Spirit in Curating*, op. cit. p. 18.

publishing industry – led by, and for, a new generation of curators who had access to such publications.

In their introduction to *Thinking About Exhibitions* in 1996, Bruce Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne highlighted what they called 'the emergence and consolidation of a new discourse on art exhibitions' and stated their intention to 'bring into debate a range of issues at play in their formation and reception.'[139] Their eclectic selection of texts focused mainly on 20th century exhibition histories – curatorship, exhibition sites, forms of installation and spectatorship – in an attempt to demonstrate how discourse around exhibitions had changed dramatically since the 1980s and to show how, in the 1990s, 'focus on art exhibitions was indicative of the political and cultural agency of so many of the debates centred on and fostered by exhibitions.'[140] The impact of key exhibitions on the history of art had already been highlighted by Bruce Altshuler a couple of years earlier, when he claimed that the history of Modernism, the historical avant-garde and the vanguard of the 1960s was one of mutual support amongst a community of artists and reception of art by a public, based on acceptance, with 'all participants enmeshed in systems of personal and economic relations.'[141] He wrote:

> The central node of that confrontation was the exhibition, where artists, critics, dealers, collectors and the general public met and responded in their various ways to what artists had done. Group exhibitions bring this aspect to the fore, and [such] events... played a critical role in what was to come down to us as the historical avant-garde.[142]

In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at MoMA*, published in 1998, Mary Anne Staniszewski robustly proposed that Western art history had overlooked the role played by curating, exhibition design and spatial exploration in early exhibition forms of the 20th century. For Staniszewski, our relationship to this past is not only a question of what kind of art is now seen to have been part of this history, but also of what kind of documentatary evidence of its display has survived, given that what 'is omitted from the past reveals as much about a culture as what is recorded as history and circulates as collective memory.'[143] For Staniszewski, visuality, display and

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[139] Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 2.

[140] Ibid. p. 4.

[141] Altshuler, Bruce. op. cit. p. 8.

[142] Ibid. p. 8.

[143] Staniszewski, Mary Anne. op. cit. p. xxi.

narrative are central to any curated exhibition, which remains the most privileged form of presenting art; display, then, may be understood as the core of exhibiting.[144] Whatever form exhibitions take, they are also the primary site of exchange in the political economy of art, 'where signification is constructed, maintained and, occasionally, deconstructed' at which one can 'establish and administer meanings of art.'[145] While writing that concentrates solely on display practices within exhibitions, at the expense of the works of art comprising them, 'can be seen as a crisis in art criticism and its languages',[146] it is important to consider that the ephemeral nature of the temporary art exhibition often means that the ways in which artworks are displayed and experienced are overlooked or remain undocumented and under-represented.

Exhibitions produce temporary forms of order but, as events, they cannot be reduced to mere 'dimension and means; the desire to bring together in thought what have hitherto appeared to be separate, coherent and homogenous entities and to redistribute what seemed preordained is what bestows upon temporary exhibitions a theoretical value and what makes them "exhibitions."'[147] In bringing order to a brief moment, temporary exhibition displays function as time capsules, representing a gathering of artworks that make sense to the curator at a given time. Other, larger, recurring exhibition-events, like Documenta or the Venice Biennale, are paradigmatic exemplars of how the genesis, propagation and mediation of art history occurs for our time. As Walther Grasskamp argued, Documenta 'anticipates the production of art history by relieving it of the pains of selection.'[148] In other words, Documenta produces a history of art in the present, exempting art from acquiring historical value through a durational process. Jean-Marc Poinsot sees exhibitions like Documenta as part of an historical continuum whereby, '...virtual continuity [is] signified by an evolution of an immediate past.'[149] As Staniszewski asserts, selecting what is included and excluded is one way in which

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[144] Ibid. p. xxi.

[145] Greenberg et al, op. cit. p. 2-3.

[146] Ibid. p. 2-3. In their introduction, Greenberg et al. asserted:
Writing about exhibitions rather than works of art within them can be seen as a crisis in criticism and its languages. This tactic may either be a compensatory device, a politicised attempt to consider works of art as interrelated rather than as individual entities, or a textual response to changes in the art world itself.

[147] Poinsot, Jean-Marc. op. cit. p. 40.

[148] Grasskamp, Walther. 'For Example, DOCUMENTA, or, how is art history produced', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 71.

[149] Poinsot, Jean-Marc. op. cit. p. 53.

culture is produced. In the historicisation of art via curated exhibitions, this is archived through their supporting catalogues, critical coverage in the specialist international art press and reviews in the mainstream media which, in turn, centre on the curators responsible for such exhibitions.

Staniszewski suggested – as Brian O'Doherty had done in his seminal 1976 essays[150] – that the history of the exhibition was one of our most culturally repressed. Despite the fact that exhibition installations have carried such crucial significance for how meaning is created in art, the contextualisation of space and its rhetoric have been overshadowed by the contextualisation of art in terms of epochs and artists' oeuvres.[151] One of the key factors in the production of artistic posterity has been the predominance of the Modernist white cube, which eliminated connotations of architecture and space and of institutional conditions. In what O'Doherty called a 'radical forgetfulness', directed at innovative pre-white-cube exhibition forms, the institutionalisation of the white cube from the 1950s onwards meant that 'presence before a work of art means that we absent ourselves in favour of the Eye and the Spectator.'[152] For O'Doherty, such a disembodied faculty meant that art was essentially seen as autonomous, to be experienced primarily via formal visual means. According to Thomas McEvilley, the endurance of power structures inherent to the white cube is ostensibly centred on that '... of undying beauty, of the masterpiece. But in fact it is a specific sensibility, with special limitations and conditions that is so glorified. By suggesting eternal ratification of a certain sensibility, the white cube suggests the eternal ratification of the claims of the caste or group sharing their sensibility.'[153]

Unlike O'Doherty's analysis, which focused primarily on artists, Staniszewski highlighted the lack of a coherent history of exhibition design, and the repression of the role of curators, as part of the history of modern art within historical art practice. She described an 'amnesia' in relation to previous innovations in display practices, particularly the influential role played by visionary artists, designers and curators – such

[150] O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999) Originally published in *Artforum* as a series of three articles in 1976 and first published in book form in 1986.

[151] See Staniszewski, Mary Anne. op. cit. pp. xxi-xxviii.

[152] O'Doherty, Brian. op. cit. p. 55.

[153] McEvilley, Thomas. 'Foreword', *Inside the White Cube*, op. cit. p. 9.

as Alfred H. Barr, Herbert Bayer, Alexander Dorner, Marcel Duchamp, Frederick Kiesler, El Lissitzky, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, Lilly Reich, Aleksander Rodchenko and Willem Sandberg – upon the production of paradigmatic installations from the 1920s onwards. In examining exhibition designs, displays and installations as part of the history of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, she raised questions about responsibility, for creating institutional conventions and constructing ideological and historical processes of curatorial praxis and the means by which art is disseminated. Hans Ulrich Obrist has also emphasised the 'very strong amnesia about the interior complexity of experimental exhibitions' from the laboratory years of the 1920-50s.[154] He writes:

> At a moment when there is so much talk about curating there is no exhibition literature. We have to start with Alexander Dorner in the 1920s in Hanover, then Willem Sandberg in the 1950s in Amsterdam. Many books are missing, there is a whole missing exhibition literature; first of all, the key texts by curatorial pioneers such as Alexander Dorner or Pontus Hultén are mostly out of print and famous radio broadcasts by W. Sandberg (who inspired the generation of Harald Szeemann) are not accessible in English. There are very few examples and that is why they are so welcome, that is why they are so important. There is a missing exhibition literature. It has a lot to do with the fact that exhibitions are not collected and that's why they fall even deeper into amnesia.[155]

Obrist has, on numerous occasions, mirrored Staniszewski's assessment of a lack of curatorial knowledge, quoting her view that, 'seeing the importance of exhibition design provides an approach to art history that does acknowledge the vitality, historicity and the time and site bound character of all aspects of culture.'[156] Obrist has claimed that this amnesia 'not only obscures our understanding of experimental exhibition history it also affects innovative curatorial practice'[157] and that these exhibitions 'not only contributed to the mutation of existing museums and exhibition structures but also pushed the boundaries toward the invention of new interdisciplinary structures.'[158] This

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[154] Obrist cited in Tawadros, Gilane and Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'In Conversation', *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (2)*, (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2000), p. 26. Obrist has also been a significant influence in bringing the ideas of Alexander Dorner, innovative director of the Hanover Museum in the 1920s, to the fore. Dorner anticipated the idea of the museum as a space of permanent transformation within dynamic parameters; the museum as a heterogeneous space of exhibition; a space that oscillates between object and process; the museum as laboratory; the museum as time storage; the museum as kraftwerk; the museum as a locus between art and life; the museum as a relative historical space that is permanently 'on the move'.

[155] See Obrist, Hans Ulrich. Interview with the author, op. cit. pp. 7. See Appendix One: OB.

[156] Obrist quoting Mary Anne Staniszewski in a paper later published in Tawadros and Obrist. op. cit. p. 27.

[157] Obrist cited in Marincola, Paula. op. cit. p. 31.

[158] Ibid. p. 31.

temporal link, between past and current practice, this urge to inscribe a history of curating, grounded in the present, is a recurring trope in Obrist's statements around his own curatorial research. Since the early 1990s, he has been recording interviews with many of the leading curatorial figures from the last century, about the thinking behind their exhibitions, as a means of addressing this historical amnesia.[159] I would argue that this displays not only an interest in establishing a curatorial history, but also a potential space for self-positioning. Although Obrist's attempt at making amends for a lack of curatorial knowledge operates as what he calls a 'protest against forgetting', it also creates a time-line between curatorial innovations from the past and his own curatorial practice, which is positioned as their logical successor.[160]

In many of the interviews I conducted, curators often referred to the amnesiac effect of absent curatorial literature, upon both historical and contemporary discourses around curating and a tendency towards both generalisation and forgetfulness within curatorial debates. As Jens Hoffmann argues, even our most recent forms of curatorial practice are being under-represented:

> What this amnesia has caused is that people talk about curating in very general terms. People like Dorner or Szeemann are always pulled out if one is in need of a historical figure with regard to the current forms of curating. Szeemann was not at all interested in being massively self-reflexive about his own practice or curating in general and Dorner is a very difficult case in my opinion. There is just so little known about his work and yet people always refer to him as a pioneer of curating...I think what is even worse than this is that today people already do not remember curators from the early 1990s that, for some reason or other, have not had that much visibility over the recent years but did groundbreaking shows only ten to fifteen years ago.[161]

In response to this discursive gap, contemporary curatorial discussions manifested themselves, in the 1990s, with the rhetoric of amnesia as a dominant trope in a drive

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[159] Some of these interviews are published in Obrist, Hans Ulrich. *Interviews: Volume I*, op. cit. Obrist has been recording interviews with curators since 1997, which will be gathered together as a book in 2008 and so far includes: Johannes Cladders, Anne d'Harnoncourt, Werner Hoffman, Walter Hopps, Pontus Hultén, Kasper König, Jean Leering, Franz Meyer, Suzanne Pagé, Seth Siegelaub, Harald Szeemann, and Walter Zanini. See Hans Ulrich Obrist's preface to his interview with Jean Leering in Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'A Protest Against Forgetting: Hans Ulrich Obrist interviews Jean Leering', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit., in which he states his reasoning: 'This project has to do with what Eric Hobsbawm calls a "protest against forgetting". In a BBC breakfast interview with David Frost, Hobsbawm said : "I mean our society is geared to make us forget. It's about today when we enjoy what we ought to; its about tomorrow when we have more things to buy, which are different; it's about today when yesterday's news is in the dustbin. But human beings don't want to forget. It's built into them."' See also Tawadros, Gilane and Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'In Conversation', op. cit. p. 28.

[160] Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'A Protest Against Forgetting: Hans Ulrich Obrist interviews Jean Leering', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit..

[161] See Hoffmann, Jens. Interview with the author, London 06/2004, p. 8. See Appendix One: HO.

towards curatorial knowledge production. Where the practice of curating and its specific discourses had previously focused on contemporary art, with little to no recourse to exhibition histories, discussions primarily persisted with the representations of individual curators. The prioritisation of all things contemporary, and on individualisation of the curatorial gesture, created a particular model of discourse that remains self-referential, curator-centred and curator-led, with unstable historical foundations.

1.6: Contemporary Curatorial Discourse Since the Late 1990s

As we have seen, curatorial practice has been made perceptible as the participation in the selection, co-production, display and/or dissemination of art by a framing of these practices. Those who curate exhibitions articulate a position and, through public discussions, conferences and publications about curating, they have attempted to convey a sense of 'commonality' and 'connectivity', to situate this position within a broader discourse.[162] Common, that is, to a generalised idea of curatorial practice, as a form of self-positioning alongside like-minded people, connected to similar forms of curatorial practice which each curator assimilates as part of their own critical discourse. While their ethos runs counter to that of the power-sharing elite, this parallels the way in which Anthony Davies, Stephan Dillemuth and Jakob Jakobsen articulate the function of self-organisation. In their co-authored essay 'There is no Alternative: THE FUTURE IS SELF ORGANISED', self-organisation is described, amongst other things, as 'a social process of communication and commonality based in exchange; sharing of similar problems, knowledge and available resources.'[163]

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[162] Since the mid-1990s, many international curating conferences have seen the invited participants presenting their own projects to others curators and to a public audience. Those that resulted in the publication of their proceedings include: *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future*, Ed. Peter White (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre for the Arts, 1996); *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*, Ed. Mika Hannula (Helsinki, NIFCA, 1998); *Curating Degree Zero:, An International Curating Symposium*, Eds. Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter (Nuremberg, Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999); *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*, Ed. Catherine Thomas (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2000); *Curating in the 21st Century*, Ed. Gavin Wade (Walsall and Wolverhampton, The New Art Gallery Walsall/University of Wolverhampton, 2000); *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (Series 1-5)*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2000-2002); *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility*, Ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001).

[163] Davies, Anthony; Dillemuth, Stephan and Jakobsen, Jakob. 'There is no Alternative: THE FUTURE IS SELF ORGANISED Part 1', *Art and its Institutions*, Ed. Nina Möntmann (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2006), pp. 176-178.

In 1989, Benjamin Buchloh identified an urgent need for articulating the curatorial position as part of art discourse, where practice as 'doing' or 'curating' necessitated a discourse as 'speaking' or 'writing', in order for the curator's function to be acknowledged as part of the institutional superstructure at the level of discourse:

> The curator observes his/her operation within the institutional apparatus of art: most prominently the procedure of abstraction and centralisation that seems to be an inescapable consequence of the work's entry into the superstructure apparatus, its transformation from practice to discourse. That almost seems to have become the curator's primary role: to function as an agent who offers exposure and potential prominence – in exchange for obtaining a moment of actual practice that is about to be transformed into myth/superstructure.[164]

This interest in discourse, as a supplement, or substitute, for practice, was highlighted in Dave Beech and Gavin Wade's speculative introduction to *Curating in the 21st Century*, 2000, in which they stated that, 'even talking is doing something, especially if you are saying something worthwhile. Doing and saying, then are forms of acting on the world.'[165] So, it seems fair to characterise the discursive as an ambivalent way of saying something *vis-à-vis* doing.

This may seem a somewhat optimistic speculation, as Mick Wilson argues in his assessment of the productive powers of language, which have been part of the stock assumptions of a wide range of experimental art practices and attendant commentary.[166] This tendency has been given further impetus by what he calls 'the Foucauldian moment in art of the last two decades, and the ubiquitous appeal of the term "discourse" as a word to conjure and perform power', to the point where 'even talking is doing something', with the value of the discursive as something located in its proxy for actual doing within discourses on curatorial practice.[167] The ascendancy of the curatorial

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[164] Buchloh, Benjamin H D. 'Since Realism there was...', *L'Exposition Imaginaire: The Art of Exhibiting in the Eighties*, ('s-Gravenhage, Rijksdienst Beeldende Kunst, 1989), pp. 96-121. To sustain such discourses, curators now look to other exhibitions and curated projects for their references. Exhibitions are now reviewed in relation to one another; biennials are compared to their previous incarnations; art fairs now evidently attempt to critique themselves through curated discussion programmes, such as the Frieze Art Fair talks programme which runs alongside the commercial side of the fair. See www.friezeartfair.com and responses to my questions regarding the function of these discussions in the context of the fair from Polly Staple, the curator of Frieze Projects and Talks, 2003-06. Staple, Polly. Interview with the author, London, 10/02/06, pp. 11-14. See Appendix One: ST.
All exhibitions, including talks programmes, are an intermediate means of conveying ideas about art that now include the position of the curator. Many of the writers and readers of art magazines are curators, where each group exhibition will be considered as part of a 'common' discourse around curatorial practice.

[165] Wade, Gavin and Beech, Dave. 'Introduction', Wade, Gavin. op. cit. pp. 9-10.

[166] Wilson, Mick. 'Curatorial Moments and Discursive Turns', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit. p. 202.

[167] Ibid. p. 202.

gesture in the 1990s also began to establish curating as a potential nexus for discussion, critique and debate, where the evacuated role of the critic in parallel cultural discourse was usurped by the neo-critical space of curating. As Liam Gillick wrote:

> My involvement in the critical space is a legacy of what happened when a semi-autonomous critical voice started to become weak, and one of the reasons that happened was that curating became a dynamic process. So people you might have met before, who in the past were critics were now curators. The brightest, smartest people get involved in this multiple activity of being mediator, producer, interface and neo-critic. It is arguable that the most important essays about art over the last ten years have not been in art magazines but they have been in catalogues and other material produced around galleries, art centres and exhibitions.[168]

Exhibitions (whichever form they adopt), and their complementary discussions, demarcate a place where information and ideas about art are performed, stored and passed on. Biennials and large-scale international art exhibitions have become the main medium through which contemporary art is mediated, experienced and historicised.[169] Just as the number of large-scale, recurring, international exhibitions has grown exponentially in the past twenty years, so has writing about curated exhibitions and, thereby, the respectability of the phenomenon of curating, which reinforces the merit of curatorial practice as a subject worthy of study. As Greenberg et al. noted in their assessment of a shift in art criticism towards writing about exhibitions from the curatorial perspective, 'This tactic may either be a compensatory device, a politicized attempt to consider works of art as interrelated rather than as individual entities, or a textual response to changes in the art world itself.'[170]

Alongside the development of a discourse specific to curating, one of the most ubiquitous material outcomes of the exhibition industry is the catalogue. As documentary tools, catalogues survive long after the exhibition has finished and, with so many exhibitions vying for attention, the production of a catalogue often guarantees that the exhibition continues to live after the event. While providing literal extensions to the exhibition, catalogues allow curators to demonstrate an intellectual position that clarifies their curatorial endeavour as a whole. While they provide a resource for documenting

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[168] Liam Gillick quoted in Bos, Saskia. 'Towards a Scenario: Debate with Liam Gillick', *De Appel Reader No. 1: Modernity Today: Contributions to a Topical Artistic Discourse*, (Amsterdam, De Appel, 2005), p. 74.

[169] Under the term 'large scale exhibitions', I would not only include major museum blockbuster exhibitions and established biennials such as Venice and Sao Paolo, Documenta (four- to five-yearly) and Manifesta, but also the large number of newer biennials in Tirana, Istanbul, Moscow and many art fairs such as Frieze, Arco, the Armoury and Basel. See Basualdo, Carlos. op. cit.

[170] Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 3.

and interpreting art, Bruce Ferguson argues that catalogues have also become the most 'privileged fetish of curators.'[171] The prominence of the figure of the curator since the 1990s has abetted this catalogue-driven discourse, in which text is often privileged over the experience of art, and the curatorial thesis overrides the intention of the exhibited artwork and its relationship with other fields of enquiry.

As an efficient curatorial form in themselves, catalogues also take on an encyclopaedic dimension within the context of biennial exhibitions, inasmuch as curators utilise the bumper-sized companion publication to make extended curatorial statements, through commissioned texts alongside their own. As artist Daniel Buren claims, this has taken on many guises in the recent past, in particular Documentas nine to eleven:

> The organisers/authors/artists of large-scale exhibitions provide results we already know: Documenta transformed into a circus (Jan Hoet) or even as a platform for the promotion of curators who profit from the occasion in order to publish their own thesis in the form of a catalogue essay (Catherine David) or as a tribune in favour of the developing-politically-correct world (Okwui Enwezor) or other exhibitions by organiser-authors trying to provide new merchandise to the ever voracious Western market for art consumption, which, like all markets, must ceaselessly and rapidly renew itself in order not to succumb ...[172]

The escalation of a catalogue-orientated discourse surrounding art and its exhibitions developed in parallel to a critical discourse around certain forms of artistic practice that were, themselves, being developed for context-specific exhibitions, or curated spaces. Discussions on art have become, to a large extent, discussions about exhibitions and the person responsible for them at an international level; such mobilisations now occur on a wider scale than ever before. As Thomas Boutoux has argued, it was throughout the 1990s that the contemporary art world embraced this global phenomenon as an opportunity to reinvent itself, led by the art world's main protagonists, impressed by 'the size and power of emergent global circulation' and the 'pervasive raggedness of this new world, focusing on global coherence and using it as a leverage to integrate sites of artistic production previously considered marginal to Western modernism.'[173]

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[171] Bruce Ferguson cited from his 'Keynote Address', *Banff 2000 International Curatorial Summit*, The Banff Centre, 24 August 2000 in Townsend, Melanie. 'The Troubles With Curating', *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Ed. Melanie Townsend (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2003), p. xv.

[172] Buren, Daniel. 'Where are the Artists?' *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, Ed. Jens Hoffmann (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2004), p. 31.

[173] Boutoux, Thomas. 'A Tale of Two Cities: Manifesta in Rotterdam and Ljubljana', *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Eds. Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2005), p. 202.

Alongside cheaper air travel, greater mobility of populations and the advent of internet technologies, art professionals were afforded greater access to places, peoples and cultures. The art world 'radically transformed itself from a universe principally organised around a few Western centers and metropolises', virtually excluding the contributions of individuals (artists, curators, critics, and historians) from the Americas, Asia, or Africa, 'into a remarkably dense international web of institutions within which professionals from all continents and almost all nations move about, work, and debate the role of art in the larger world.'[174]

This art world migration came about not only as a consequence of a new global condition, but also as the result of a professionalisation of both curatorial and artistic practice since the late 1980s.[175] This is in stark contrast to the 1980s generation who arrived at curating as an accidental career, as Catherine de Zegher suggested in her comparison of the current generation with the one working throughout the late 1970s and the 1980s:

> The key shift is that curatorial practice has become professionalised. It used to be amateur in a way. My generation belongs in between the amateur and professionalised approach. We all studied art history, but were not working with history only; we were working with actuality and, at the start, nobody really knew where to place us, because contemporary art as such didn't then exist as a study, let alone as a practice, so we closely lived that transition. For example, when you were a lawyer, you were a lawyer, a professional; now, being an artist is considered a profession...I have the impression that the step into the profession of curator occurred at the same time as into the profession of being an artist.[176]

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[174] Ibid. p. 202.

[175] Since Le Magasin in Grenoble launched the first postgraduate curatorial training programme in Europe in 1987, there has been an expansion of professional curating courses throughout Europe and North America, already outlined in my introduction. For a brief history of the most prominent of these courses in Europe and North America, see Bellini, Andrea. 'Curatorial Schools: Between Hope and Illusion', *Flash Art*, Vol. XXXIX, 250, (October, 2006), pp. 88-92. Also see my interviews with Anna Harding – who was responsible for setting up the MA in Creative Curating at Goldsmith's College, London in 1995 – in Harding, Anna. Interview with the author, London, 07/02/04. See Appendix One: HA. Teresa Gleadowe – who was responsible for setting up the MA in Curating Contemporary Art at the Royal College of Art and Design in 1992 – in Gleadowe, Teresa. Interview with the author, London, 25/03/06, See Appendix One: GL. Saskia Bos – who was responsible for setting up the Curatorial Training Programme at De Appel in Amsterdam in 1994 – in Bos, Saskia. Interview with the author, Amsterdam, 21/09/05 See Appendix One: BO. I also visited Le Magasin, Bard and The Whitney ISP as part of my research; the interviews and conversations I had with those currently involved in the programmes there were either unrecorded or were never transcribed. The number of students enrolled on all these courses has differed over the years but to give an indication of the quantity of students graduating from these courses, when I worked as a visiting tutor on the MFA Curating course at Goldsmiths between 2006-07, there were twenty-five first year students participating on a two-year course. Between 1995-2003, sixty students completed the de Appel Curatorial Training Programme who take on a relatively small group of students of six per year. For the names of these students see *If Walls Had Ears: 1984-2005*, Ed. Edna Van Duyn (Amsterdam, de Appel, 2005), p. 668.

[176] de Zegher, Catherine. Interview with the author, New York, 11/11/05. p. 4. See Appendix One: DE. See also Storr, Robert. Interview with the author, op. cit. pp. 1-2. Robert Storr's assessment of his own fortuitous arrival into curating in the 1980s was described as follows:

> I'd been an art handler for a considerable time in the eighties, so I knew how to put shows together on that side, the technical side, which was actually far more important than going to a curatorial programme in many respects.

By the 1990s, curatorial anthologies began to appear – tending to arise from international meetings between curators as part of curatorial summits, symposia, seminars and conferences – beginning with Ute Meta Bauer's *Meta 2: The New Spirit in Curating* in 1992. Without exception, these publications placed their emphasis on individual practice, first-person narratives and curator self-positioning, as articulated through primary interviews, statements and exhibition re-presentations.[177] More recent publications, such as *MIB – Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice* (2004) merely follow suit, by giving over much of their space to slight, insubstantial and personalised responses by curators on the subject of their own rarefied practice. While claiming to represent the 'New Spirit in Curating' (where 'Biographical notes can be found beside well-placed theoretical accents, cheerful interpretations of purpose, political goose-stepping, and embellished ego pirouettes'),[178] the vast proportion of content is made up of statements by curators about their own positions, again reinforcing a curator-led discourse. For Michael Brenson, the 'curator's moment' had truly arrived by the mid-1990s, with the emergence of biennials, organised international meetings and curatorial summits:

I'd been an art handler for a considerable time in the eighties, so I knew how to put shows together on that side, the technical side, which was actually far more important than going to a curatorial programme in many respects. But that's it...I'm a painter and I went to a regular sort of studio art college affair in Chicago, and a couple of other places before that, and I spent a lot of time in museums looking at what was there, got to the back rooms of a certain number of them just by persistence and interest and so on so...But, also as an art handler I go to the back rooms but no, no, I have no formal art history training at all.

[177] There has been a significant publishing industry around contemporary curatorial practice and its related discourse since the late 1980s, in particular throughout the 1990s, which has continued to intensify until today. During this period, one of the major changes in the art world has been the significant transformation of the role(s) of the curator of contemporary art exhibitions and the discourses surrounding exhibition-making in an international context. In chronological order, key curatorial anthologies include: Meta Bauer, Ute. *Meta 2: The New Spirit in Curating*, (Stuttgart, Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, 1992); White, Peter. *Naming a Practice: Curatorial Strategies for the Future*, (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre for the Arts, 1996); *Art and Design Magazine: On Curating – the Contemporary Art Museum and Beyond*, No.52, Ed. Anna Harding (London, Academy Editions, 1997); *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*, Ed. Mika Hannula (Helsinki, NIFCA, 1998); *Curating Degree Zero, An International Curating Symposium*, Eds. Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter (Nuremberg, Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999); Thomas, Catherine. *The Edge of Everything: Reflections on Curatorial Practice*, (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2000); *Curating in the 21st Century*, Ed. Gavin Wade (Walsall and Wolverhampton, The New Art Gallery Walsall/University of Wolverhampton, 2000); *The Producers: Contemporary Curators in Conversation (Series 1-5)*, Eds. Susan Hiller and Sarah Martin (Gateshead and Newcastle, Baltic and University of Newcastle, 2000-2002); Thea, Carolee. *Foci: Interviews with 10 International Curators*, (New York, Apexart, 2001); *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility*, Ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001); Kuoni, Carin. *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum*, (New York, Independent Curators International (ICI), 2001); *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Ed. Melanie Townsend (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2003); *MIB – Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice*, Eds. Tannert, Christoph, Ute Tischler and Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2004); Gillick, Liam and Lind, Maria. *Curating With Light Luggage*, (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2005).

[178] Tannert and Tischler, op. cit. p. 10.

> After listening to heads of international biennials and triennials speak to one another for three days about their hopes and concerns, it was clear to me that the era of the curator has begun. The organizers of these exhibitions, as well as other curators around the world who work across cultures and are able to think imaginatively about the points of compatibility and conflict among them, must be at once aestheticians, diplomats, economists, critics, historians, politicians, audience developers, and promoters. They must be able to communicate not only with artists but also with community leaders, business executives, and heads of state... As much as any artist, critic, or museum director, the new curator understands, and is able to articulate, the ability of art to touch and mobilize people and encourage debates about spirituality, creativity, identity, and the nation. The texture and tone of the curator's voice, the voices it welcomes or excludes, and the shape of the conversation it sets in motion are essential to the texture and perception of contemporary art.[179]

What Brenson identified as the curator's moment in the 1990s could be divided into Williams' 'residual', 'emergent' and 'dominant' moments in the formation of a discourse specific to the role of the curator.[180] Firstly, as I have argued, demystification remains an actively residual element – originally associated with a few independent exhibition-makers from the late 1960s – with the side-effect being super-visibility for the curatorial position since the late 1980s when the practice of curating subverted museum display techniques to become a form of subjective curator self-presentation. Secondly, the emergence of a discourse specific to curatorial practice began as a gradual development, when curators taking part in symposia and publications used their own practice as their main subject matter and discursive focus. The emergent stage of the curator's moment, represented by the ubiquity of 'curated by' attached to every exhibition, entailed a paradigm shift in the 1990s towards curating as a global profession, with the emergence of new biennials, which I will discuss in Chapter Two. The expansion of curatorial discourse was accelerated by the advent of curatorial training programmes in the early 1990s. Students and programme leaders began to look at existing exhibition models and a relatively small number of established curatorial precedents, with a focus on exhibition history, scrutinising the curatorial component instead of the artwork(s). Thirdly, since the 1990s, the dominant discourse around the figure of the biennial curator created a market for a nomadic type of global curator at a time when new associations were being attached to curating, as a potentially creative

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[179] Brenson, Michael. 'The Curator's Moment – Trends in the Field of International Contemporary Art Exhibitions', *Art Journal*, 57:4, (Winter, 1998), p. 16. See also pp. 16-27.

[180] Williams, Raymond. op. cit. pp. 121-127.

form of cultural practice and as a possible career choice for artists, art historians, critics and art administrators.

The discursive turn towards curating in the 1990s attempted to formulate a new language and vocabulary for curating as a diverse, internationalised practice and, through these articulations, configured a centralised concept for an individualised curatorial act.[181] Curating is now represented as an adaptive discipline, using and adopting inherited codes and rules of behaviour, and there is now a long list of metaphors that attempt to reconcile diverse modes of practice, ranging from medium or 'middleman,'[182] via 'midwife'[183] and the curator as editor, DJ, technician, agent, manager, platform provider, promoter and scout, to the more absurd: diviner, fairy godmother and, even, god.[184] Since the late 1990s, the main rhetoric of associated texts acknowledges the subjective nature of exhibition-making and the importance of a growing awareness of the curator's part in shaping exhibitions.[185] By way of concluding this chapter, it is worth noting that, over the past three years, art magazines have begun to focus on curatorial practice as one of their major subjects for discussions which have,

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[181] One major aspect to dominate these emergent discourses was the continued use of analogy, metaphor and comparisons between curating and other professions. As curator and critic Tom Morton wrote:

> 'Curating as...' constructions speak of a welcome self-reflexivity and plurality of approach, but they almost inevitably stick in the craw. There's a faint atmosphere of subterfuge about them, of borrowing the glamour or gravitas of another profession in an attempt to graft it onto one that we're aware is, for all its possibilities, also commonly bound up with the grey, clerk-y stuff of fundraising and filling out loan forms. (Among these contradictions, the worst offenders I've come across include 'curator as anthropologist', 'curator as stylist' and once, unforgivably, 'curator as DJ'. More importantly, the fashion for analogy in framing the figure of the curator points to a certain lack of self-confidence in the field, as though curating is an activity that can only be understood, or even validated, with reference to activities that exert a greater gravitational pull.

Morton, Tom. 'The Name of the Game', *frieze*, No. 97, (December, 2005). See http://www.frieze.com/column_single.asp?c=304 (accessed, 21/11/06).

What Morton argued for was a return to the idea of the curator as being involved in the activity of curating as a form of authorship, similar to how a novelist is an author, regardless of whatever metaphors can be used to describe how different kinds of novel-writing can exist at any one time, and how various methods of writing a novel can produce individual models of authorship. Morton supports the idea of the function of the curator as an author because, for him, the author's function is to provide a view of the world that we do or do not yet know. He goes on to reject the various ways in which curating has been linked to other professions, especially the idea of the 'curator as editor', because it relies on analogy every bit as much as the 'curator as artist' does.

[182] Andreasen, Søren and Bang Larsen, Lars. op. cit.

[183] See Lind, Maria. Interview with the author, op. cit. p. 1. See Appendix One: LI. Maria Lind states 'I am actually detached from the 'cura' part of it: the caring part of it, with empathy being involved with something, to help it come about somehow. I think, for me, it is also connected with the role of the curator as a sort of midwife who is assisting in bringing something new into being.'

[184] See Babias, Marius and Waldvogel, Florian. 'Is the Curator the DJ of Art?' Tannert, Christoph. 'Curators as Technicians' and Hoffmann, Justin. 'God is a Curator', op. cit. pp. 48-52, pp. 135-136 and p. 107 respectively.
On the notion of curator as editor, Catherine David states: 'I never liked the discourse around the idea of the curator as an artist. I think it's very childish and I don't think it's very interesting. I think it's the work of editing, putting, articulating ideas, forms in a certain moment and I think it's nothing less, nothing more, and after that you can be very intuitive.' See David, Catherine. Interview with the author, Paris, 14/04/05, p. 14. See Appendix One: DA.

[185] Thomas, Catherine. op. cit. p. ix.

in turn, been led by invited curators.[186] One explanation for this focus may simply be that many critics are now primarily curators, but I would argue that the basis for this concentration is manifold. As I have outlined, a parallel publishing industry responded to the curator's enhanced visibility within the field of contemporary art, where the ubiquity of the curator, a lack of criticality around the efficacy of the expanding field of curating and, most significantly, the growth of a new audience meant an ever-increasing number of curators, curatorial students and graduates were in search of relevant material. The 1990s was a period of professionalisation for curators and artists alike; there was a new market and a new-found field of study, centred upon the medium of the exhibition and those involved in its mediation, on a more global scale than ever before.

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[186] In the past four years alone, these have included: *a-n*'s supplementary issue on 'Curated Space' (2005); essays with titles such as 'Curating Then and Now', 'Curating U-topics', 'Curator and Artist', 'The Co-dependent Curator', 'The Invisible Curator', 'Curating Doubt' and 'I am a Curator' have appeared in *Art Monthly* since 2003; *Contemporary*'s 'Special Issue on Curators' (2005) contained twenty interviews with curators; *Artforum*'s 2003 discussion on 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition' included Francesco Bonami, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor and Hans Ulrich Obrist; *Flash Art*'s 'New Voices in Curating I and II' surveys in 2002 and 2003, led by Jens Hoffmann, asked curators to answer 'what are the pressing issues curators are debating about?'; *Art Papers*' 'Curating Now: An Informal Report'; *frieze* has regular columns by curators Alex Farquharson, Tom Morton and Robert Storr, who have all published texts about the shifts in power towards the curator and away from the critic and/or artist, as well as interviews with curators and discussions led by curators such as 'Debate: Biennials' with curators Charles Esche and Francesco Bonami, and *MJ – Manifesta Journal*, the first quarterly dedicated to contemporary curatorial issues, which is edited by two curators – Igor Zabel and Viktor Misiano – with essays almost entirely by curators, co-published by the International Manifesta Foundation (the organisation responsible for Manifesta). There have, so far, only been four issues of *MJ – Manifesta Journal: Journal of Contemporary Curatorship* which may, in part, be due to the death of one of its editors, Igor Zabel, in 2005. Each collection of texts has been constructed around a dominant theme: 'The Revenge of the White Cube?' No.1, (Spring/Summer, 2003); 'Biennials', No.2, (Winter 2003/Spring, 2004), 'Exhibition as a Dream', No.3, (Spring/Summer, 2004) and 'Teaching Curatorship' (Autumn/Winter, 2004). *a-n: Future Forecast: Curated Space* (November, 2005) included contributions from artists who frequently curate such as Jananne Al-Ani, Shezad Dawood, Jeremy Deller and Rachel Garfield and curators such as David A. Bailey, Louise Short, Erica Tan, Gavin Wade and Mark Wilsher. Articles that have appeared in *Art Monthly* include: Farquharson, Alex. 'Curator *and* Artist', *Art* Monthly, No. 270, (October, 2003), pp. 13-16; Farquharson, Alex. 'I Curate, You Curate, We Curate...' *Art Monthly*, No. 269, (September, 2003), pp. 7-10; Burnett, Craig. 'The Invisible Curator', *Art Monthly*, No.291, (November, 2005), pp. 1-4; O'Neill, Paul. 'The Co-dependent Curator', *Art Monthly*, No. 291, (November, 2005), pp. 7-10; O'Neill, Paul. 'Curating U-topics', *Art Monthly*, No. 272, (December-January, 2003-04), pp. 7-10; O'Neill, Paul. 'I am a Curator', *Art Monthly*, No.275, (April, 2004), pp. 7-10; Charlesworth, JJ. 'Curating Doubt', *Art Monthly*, No.294, (March, 2006), pp. 1-4, and Coles, Alex. 'Curating: Then and Now', *Art Monthly*, No.275, (April, 2004), pp. 1-4. The curators interviewed in *Contemporary*, 21, Number 77, (2005) were Daniel Birnbaum, Francesco Bonami, Dan Cameron, Massimiliano Gioni & Maurizio Cattelan, Isabel Carlos, Suzanne Cotter, David Elliot, Richard Flood, Rosa Lee Goldberg, Hou Hanru, Yuko Hasegawa, Jens Hoffmann, Laura Hoptman, Udo Kittelmann, Vasif Kortun, Barthomeau Marí, Edi Muka, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Norman Rosenthal, Beatrix Ruf and Adam Szymczyk. Hoffmann, Jens. 'New Voices in Curating I', *Flash Art*, No.222, (January/February, 2002), and Hoffmann, Jens. 'New Voices in Curating II', *Flash Art*, No. 228, (January/February, 2003), were compiled from responses by curators working both independently, but mainly in the context of institutional posts in Europe, the United States and the Americas, including Adam Budak, Massimiliano Gioni, Søren Grammel, Chus Martinez, Tone O. Nielsen and Cristina Ricupero. The discussion 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', *Artforum*, Vol. XLII, (November, 2003), pp. 152-163 was introduced by Tim Griffin and moderated by James Meyer with curators Francesco Bonami, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and artists Martha Rosler and Yinka Shonibare. Firstenberg, Lauri et al.'Curating Now: An Informal Report', *Art Papers*, (September/October, 2005), was structured around questions and answers with curators working in the US and Canada, found at http://www.artpapers.org/feature_articles/curating.htm (accessed 01/08/07). Articles that have appeared in *frieze* include Farquharson, Alex. 'Is the Pen Still Mightier?' *frieze*, 92, (June/July/August, 2005), pp. 118-119; Farquharson, Alex. 'Bureaux de Change', *frieze*, 101, (September, 2006), pp. 156-160 looked at new institutional strategies developed by curators within smaller institutions in Europe such as Maria Lind at Künsterverein München, Catherine David at Witte de With, Charles Esche at Rooseum, Malmö and Nicolas Bourriaud and Jérôme Sans at Palais de Tokyo, Paris; Storr, Robert. 'Reading Circle part one', *frieze*, 93, (September 2005), p. 27, and 'Reading Circle part two', *frieze*, 94, (October, 2005), p. 25; Morton, Tom. 'The Name of the Game, *frieze*, 97, (December 2005); Heiser, Jörg. 'Curating: The Shape of Things to Come', *frieze*, 81, (March, 2004), pp. 52-53, and Bonami, Francesco and Esche, Charles. 'Debate: Biennials', *frieze*, 92, (June/July/August, 2005), pp. 104-105.

Chapter Two

Biennial Culture: Curating in the Context of International Biennials and Temporary Large-Scale Exhibitions Since 1989

Introduction

The most evident transformation within contemporary curatorial practice in the past twenty years has been its increasing operation at an inter-national, trans-national, multi-national and glocal[187] level, with the local and global in constant dialogue with one another. The significance of the politics of localism is particularly evident in the case of biennials, in which the statement of the location, in the title of the exhibition-event,[188] acts as a rhetorical manoeuvre in appropriating cultural status. The meanings and myths that attend the collective imagination are attached to the relevant city, region or country, giving the location a centralised position within an international exhibition of art. In the process, the site of the exhibition begins to determine who is included, who participates and who the viewers are, as well as determining the position from which the exhibition will be read.[189] As Bruce Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne stated, 'The location of an international exhibition constructs a map of the world from the perspective of both the city and the country that sponsor it, underlining any notions of an equality of nations.'[190]

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[187] The term 'glocal' refers to an economic category, first identified in the 1980s, whereby local economies adapted their systems to suit their own needs while remaining part of a global market. 'Glocal' has been used to describe an 'increasingly dense superimposition and interpenetration of global political-economic forces and local regional responses within the parameters of a single, re-scaled framework of state territorial organisation.' See Brenner, Neil. 'Global cities, glocal states: global city formation and state territorial restructuring in contemporary Europe'. *Review of International Political Economy* 5:1 Spring, p. 16, 1998. 'Glocalisation' originally related to the adaptation of certain farming techniques, where produce, crops and services were customised to suit local cultural conditions, while being intended for the global market. Glocalisation was popularised by sociologist Roland Robertson in the 1990s extending its understanding to the evolution of social practices which adapted existing sociological behaviours to suit local characteristics. See Robertson, Roland. 'The Conceptual Promise of Glocalisation: Commonality and Diversity.' Found at http://artefact.mi2.hr/_a04/lang_en/theory_robertson_en.htm (accessed 10/05/07). See also Robertson, Roland. 'Globalisation or Glocalisation? *Journal of International Communication* 1 (1), (June, 1994), pp. 33-52 and Robertson, Roland. 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,' in *Global Modernities*, Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (London, Sage Publications, 1994), pp. 25-44. See also Bauman, Zygmunt. *Globalization: The Human Consequences*. (Cambridge, Polity Press, 1998)

[188] I use the term 'exhibition-event' here, and throughout this dissertation, as the place in which art is experienced through the modality of a one-off event. By definition, it provides a short-lived experience of art and statements about art and life, at a given moment in time, where each exhibition is written about as an event for discussion and debate that is centred on the exhibition.

[189] See Ferguson, Bruce, Greenberg, Reesa and Nairne, Sandy. 'Shifting Art and Exhibitions', *The Manifesta Decade: Debates on Contemporary Art Exhibitions and Biennials in Post-Wall Europe*, Eds. Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 2005), pp. 47-62.

[190] Ibid. p. 47. For a further examination of the role of location in biennial exhibitions see Hou, Hanru. 'Towards a New Locality: Biennials and "Global Art"', Ibid. pp. 57-62. See also Doherty, Claire. 'Curating Wrong Places...or Where Have All the Penguins Gone?' *Curating Subjects*, Ed. Paul O'Neill (London and Amsterdam, Open Editions

In *Contemporary* magazine's special issue on curating, published in 2005, Isabel Stevens produced a substantive list of eighty official biennials/triennials to be held around the globe between 2006 and 2008.[191] The term 'biennial' or 'biennale' (depending on one's cultural background) has become all-encompassing shorthand for large-scale international group exhibitions which are organised locally with connection to other national cultural networks.[192] Biennials are temporary spaces of mediation, usually given over to (an) invited curator(s), often supported by a local socio-cultural network. They are interfaces between art and wider publics – publics that are at once local and global, resident and nomadic, non-specialist and art-worldly. They are punctual manifestations, occurring at regular intervals, that are intended to be inter-national, trans-national and cross-networked.

A genealogy of such perennial exhibitions demonstrates varied histories. For example, the Venice Biennale, which began at the end of the nineteenth century (1895), was modelled on world expositions, whereas others, such as the Bienal São Paulo (1949), arose five decades and two world wars later and has, like Venice, been taking place ever since. In the brief period between 1984 (the first edition of the Havana Biennial) and the present day, a large number of major international biennials have been established, including those of Istanbul (1987), Lyon (1992), Santa Fe (1995), Gwangju (1995), Johannesburg (1995), Shanghai (1996), Berlin (1996) and Montreal (1998). The specific conditions under which each was established are as diverse as their resources. In all cases, diplomacy, politics and commerce converge in a powerful movement whose purpose seems to be the appropriation and instrumentalisation of the symbolic value of art. While the specific motives of each biennial change over time – with Venice originally attempting to update a universalistic ideology clearly related to European

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and De Appel, 2007), pp. 101-108; Doherty, Claire. 'Location, Location', *Art Monthly*, No. 281, (November, 2004), pp. 7-10 and Doherty, Claire, Ed. *From Studio to Situation*, (London, Black Dog, 2004).

[191] Stevens, Isabel. 'IT'S SO TWO YEARS AGO', *Contemporary*, 21, Issue 77, (2005), pp. 22-32. The figures regarding how many biennials exist across the globe have varied according to how they are defined by the individual author/researcher and the level of impact/visibility these so-called biennials may have in an art world context. Ivo Mesquita suggested that there were over forty biennial exhibitions in 2003, a full list of which are provided on the title page of his essay Mesquita, Ivo. 'Biennials, biennials, biennials…', *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Ed. Melanie Townsend (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2003), pp. 63- 67.

[192] For a brief genealogy of large-scale exhibitions see Basualdo, Carlos. 'The Unstable Institution', *What Makes a Great Art Exhibition?*, Ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2006), pp. 52-61. Basualdo suggests that, when we use the term 'large-scale exhibition', we are referring to a certain type of exhibition, which is based on the large number of works, the size of the budget involved and the nature of the institutional framework. The 'large-scale exhibition' model could include those organised by a traditional institution, such as a museum, but primarily we use this term to refer to biennials, international fairs and recurring events which have internationalism at the core of both their identity and the nature of their enquiry and take the form of a temporary, mediated space that continues to be transformed each time they occur.

colonialism and Havana staging an ideological project of a diametrically opposing nature – the type of operation is similar. The majority of these exhibitions emphasise the internationalist nature of cultural and artistic production, where it is not a question of a unified vision, but rather a consideration of internationalism as a term under dispute in diverse ways.

The nature of the various interests that generate such events present a unified commitment to internationalism within the art world. In their prophetic essay, of the early 1990s, Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne stated:

> However progressive the political or economic intentions behind them, international exhibitions still invite a presumption that the curators have access to an illusionary world view, and that spectators may follow in their wake. But a more specific and sustained engagement with communities and audiences, creating meanings beyond the spectacular and mere festivalising of such occasions, may produce a new genre of exhibition. It seems that in order to accommodate both artists' needs and audience demands, the new exhibition must have reciprocity and dialogue built into its structure. How successfully this is accomplished will determine international exhibition maps of the future.[193]

By considering extant curatorial statements, publications and exhibition catalogues and by analysing the spaces of the exhibitions themselves, this chapter will attempt to track the development of a discourse around this 'new genre of exhibition' and their transformation since 1989. Such a task is a challenging one, given the increasing number of biennials that have taken place during this period. I have chosen to focus on my direct experience of certain exhibitions while reviewing the sizeable body of curatorial texts that have been published in relation to this phenomenon since 1989. In addition to attending a number of key biennials, I have interviewed many of the curators principally responsible for them.

Given the sheer number of such events around the world, any attempt at an overall chronology could only afford a partial depiction of the histories of each biennial.[194]

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[193] Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 56. This essay, written in the early 1990s,when perennial exhibitions began to proliferate, was originally published as 'Mapping International Exhibitions', on the occasion of Antwerp being named a European Cultural Capital in 1993, in *On Taking a Normal Situation and Rethinking it into Overlapping and Multiple Readings of Conditions Past and Present*, (Antwerp, E. Antonis, 1993). It was also later re-published for *On Curating – the Contemporary Art Museum and Beyond: Art and Design Magazine*, No.52, Ed. Anna Harding (London, Academy Editions, 1997), pp. 30-37.

[194] It is also worth noting that there have been many transformative moments in the history of the biennial. As a model, it has come a long way since the Venice Biennale was established in 1895 – as a national biennial exhibition of Italian art, based on the model of the 19th Century world fairs, that would reserve a section for foreign art selected by a jury – or the intention of the first Bienal de São Paulo – to tranform the city and its culture as part of a Modernist reconstruction programme after the war in 1951 – or Documenta – set up as a national post-war initiative to reconnect a defeated Germany with the rest of the world in 1955. Harald Szeemann's appointment, in 1972, as the first

Instead, I have decided to take a more comparative approach, by considering the developments represented by key large-scale global exhibitions. Beginning with 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' (1989) and going on to consider, in particular, Documenta 11 (2002), directed by Okwui Enwezor, and '50th Biennale di Venezia [50th Venice Biennial]: Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer' (2003) directed by Francesco Bonami, it is my aim to demonstrate:

1) The emergence of a model of global curatorial practice since 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' that went beyond previously-established Western centres of art production.
2) How curating within the context of large-scale perennial exhibitions has, since 1989, primarily maintained a trans-cultural approach.
3) How curators of such exhibitions have supported a general view of cultural globalism as the productive criterion for a more inclusive exhibition, with globalism itself providing one of the central themes. [195]

'independent' artistic director of Documenta, with sole responsibility for the exhibition and its concept, was vital in articulating such large-scale exhibitions and curatorial manifestos. His idea – of extending his exhibition 'Documenta 5: The Questioning of Reality – Image Worlds Today' to incorporate a programme of events and performances over its duration – was also a critical move in establishing the genesis of an exhibition as world event. 'Documenta 5' would be what Szeemann called an 'event concept', realised as a 'truly avant-garde exhibition', not defined as a 'static collection of objects' but as 'a process of mutually interrelated events.' (Harald Szeemann cited in Mackert, Gabriele. 'At Home in Contradictions: Harald Szeemann's *Documenta*', *50 Years documenta 1955-2005: Archive in Motion: Documenta Manual*, Eds. Michael Glasmeier and Karin Stengel (Kassel and Göttingen, Kunsthalle Friedericianum Kassel and Steidl, 2005), p. 254). Since the late 1980s, the move away from overtly nationalist aims, towards a more integrated, global exhibition, has been facilitated by a number of key shifts within the curatorial framework of biennials that have been appropriated by subsequent biennials. Two of the factors which define biennials emerging in the 1990s as universally international exhibitions are: 1) the end of the primacy of national selection (with the exception of Venice – where a structure of national representation is still applied by the committee in relation to the selection of the representative for each of the national pavilions – a greater emphasis upon the curated components is retained, at least in published discussions and debates) and embedded notions of Establishment within the art world, and 2) the participation of artists beyond the established Western centres of art in the interest of a new internationalism. Harald Szeemann was influential in redefining the function of the biennial and in triggering its move away from a national model, with an emphasis on the contemporary rather than an older art Establishment. As a member of the management committee of the Venice Biennale in 1980 (along with Achille Bonito Oliva, Michael Compton, and Martin Kunz), he introduced the 'Aperto' (Open) as an international exhibition for younger artists, which managed to displace the central exhibition of established artists over the subsequent decade. When Szeemann returned to curate the '48th Venice Biennale: Aperto Over All' in 1999 (and then again in 2001 with the '49th Venice Biennale: Plateau of Humankind'), he incorporated Aperto into 'D'Apertutto' (everywhere) as one large international exhibition in the Italian pavilion and the Corderie at the Arsenale – that explicitly transcended the generations – to become the dominant aspect of the curated part of the biennale today. Both of these moves allowed for the inclusion of artists unrepresented in the national pavilions of the surrounding Giardini and acknowledged the fault lines of such a premise within a new global biennial model. For a chronological survey of Szeemann's practice see Müller, Hans-Joachim. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2005). Also see the relevant exhibition catalogues for: *48th Venice Biennale: Aperto Over All*, Eds. Harald Szeemann and Cecilia Liveriero Lavelli (Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia and Marsilio Editori, Venice, 1999) and *49th Venice Biennale: Plateau of Humankind*, Eds. Harald Szeemann and Cecilia Liveriero Lavelli (Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia and Marsilio Editori, Venice, 2001).

[195] I use the term 'globalism' to describe a push for a greater degree of diversity in social and cultural networks of connectivity involving the movement of ideas, information, images, practices and people who also carry ideas and information with them across the globe. Globalism, in the context of the international art field, could also be described as the trend for seeking to explain worldwide and trans-cultural patterns, characterised by the networks of interconnections that span inter-continental distances beyond the Western hemisphere and that attempt to transcend local, national or individual state concerns for the sake of greater diversity in trans-cultural and social connectivity. By contrast, the term 'globalisation' should be understood as a pervasive neo-liberal force which transcends national

The focus of this enquiry is not so much on the art and artists who have exhibited under biennial conditions but on how these conditions of display have affected contemporary curatorial practice and, in turn, created a more global position for the figure of the curator within the field of cultural production. Some of the central questions posed here are:

1) How have biennials impacted upon contemporary curatorial practice?
2) How have curators dealt with such conditions of production?
3) How have biennials configured a role for the curator?
4) How have biennials influenced contemporary art production and its mediation through published art criticism?

I will demonstrate how discussions and debates on biennials have continued to mobilise an expanded, centralised position for the figure of the curator and to demonstrate how the 'single author' curatorial model has gradually moved towards more collaborative, discursive and collective models of curating during the period 1989-2007.

2.1: 'Les Magiciens de La Terre' (1989) and the Curator as Global Author

'Les Magiciens de la Terre' (1989) was curated by Jean-Hubert Martin and Mark Francis. It was originally organised as a substitute for the traditional biennial format when Martin became director of the Paris Biennale in 1985. Instead of contributions selected by cultural representatives from each of the participating countries, as had been previously the case, the exhibition would explore the practices of artists in Asia, Africa and Latin America alongside contemporary works from the United States and Western Europe. It has often been cited, both at the time of the exhibition and subsequently, as an anthropological approach to curating.[196]

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boundaries in the name of economic free trade resulting in a shrinkage of space-time distances, leading to economic global interdependence alongside the homogenising effects on vernacular cultures that occur during the processes of transformation taking place within contemporary social and cultural life when there is such a widening, deepening and speeding-up of worldwide economic interconnectedness. See Held, David, McGrew, Anthony et al. *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 1999), pp. 2-10. See also *The Global Transformations Reader: An Introduction to the Globalization Debate*, Eds. David Held and Anthony McGrew (Cambridge, UK, Polity Press, 2003), pp. 75-83.

[196] The 1980s' notion of the 'curator-as-anthropologist' was already apparent in the exhibition 'Primitivism', curated by William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, in 1985. 'Primitivism' was heavily criticised for three main reasons: 1) The erasure of all differences entailed by the concept 'affinities'; 2) The curator's over-aestheticisation of these objects, partly due to a lack of contextualisation – other than the name of the lender, there was an absence of authors' names, dates, provenance and historical background provided alongside these objects – and 3) The generic use of the term 'tribal' in reference to non-Western objects. See Lamoureux, Johanne. 'From Form to Platform: The Politics of Representation and the Representation of Politics', *Art Journal*, (Spring, 2005),

Reading some of the earliest responses to the exhibition, it seems to have been sympathetically interpreted as the achievement of one individual, in spite of the fact that the exhibition was co-curated by Mark Francis. Labelled 'The Whole Earth Show' in his interview with curator Jean-Hubert Martin, Benjamin Buchloh accorded an understanding of the exhibition as a single text, realised by an individual author, and laid the onus upon Martin as its sole producer.[197] Buchloh consistently refers to the exhibition as the property of the curator: 'Your exhibition is also aiming at decentering the traditional social definitions of the art public...'[198] This perspective was echoed by Clémentine Deliss, in a text published in the same year, in which she described 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' as 'Jean-Hubert Martin's international-exhibition-to-end-all-international-exhibitions, [which] led visitors from one world-view, one definition of art, to another.'[199] Rarely focusing on the artworks on show both Buchloh and Deliss's comments considered the framework of the exhibition as an independent object for study, with Martin prioritised as the main subject of their critique.[200] While referencing of the exhibition as the work of a single author – understood as being the principal mediating form of one curator – has subsequently become commonplace, 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' was the first exhibition of its kind to confer a worldly view on the figure of the curator.

The exhibition not only presented an international mix of artists, from radically diverse cultures and environments, but it also configured a leading role for the curator at a more global level. Although the exhibition was later criticised for obliterating 'the cultural specificity of artists from traditions different from those of the curators',[201]

Found at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0425/is_1_64/ai_n13807673 (accessed 24/03/06); Foster, Hal. 'The Primitive Unconscious Modern', *October*, 34 (Autumn, 1985), pp. 45-70; and Ferguson, Bruce W. 'Exhibition Rhetorics', Greenberg et al. op. cit. pp. 175-90. Although Jean-Hubert Martin had already begun work on 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' by the time of 'Primitivism', his curatorial decisions were, in part at least, a critical response to some of the failures of the MoMA exhibition. This was reflected in his decision to work only with living artists, his wish to exhibit 50% practitioners of non-Western origin and his desire to present the selected works because of their heterogeneous meanings, based on cultural difference rather than their homogenous forms. See Martin, Jean-Hubert and Francis, Mark. *Les Magiciens de la Terre*, (Paris, Centre George Pompidou, 1989), and Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. 'The Whole Earth Show', *Art in America*, Vol. V, No. 77, (May, 1989), pp. 150-58. For other reviews and responses to the exhibition see: Special issue on 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' translated from Les Cahiers du Musée National d'art Moderne, *Third text: Third World perspectives on contemporary art and culture*, No. 6, (Spring, 1989).

[197] Buchloh, Benjamin H.D. op. cit. p.156

[198] Ibid. p.156.

[199] Deliss, Clémentine. 'Conjuring Tricks', *Artscribe International*, (September/October, 1989), p. 48.

[200] Martin, Jean-Hubert and Francis, Mark. op. cit.

[201] Karp, Ivan and Wilson, Fred. 'Constructing the Spectacle of Culture', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 265.

'Les Magiciens de la Terre,' is widely acknowledged as the first large-scale international group exhibition to have raised the issue of inclusion of contemporary art and artists from non-Western centres of production. It is cited by many curators (Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche and Robert Storr to name but a few)[202] as a corresponding influence on later large-scale exhibitions and on bipolar concepts of margin and centre, globalism and globalisation, identity and difference, nation and community, hybridity and fragmentation, local and international, as contested topics. 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' may have opened up such issues for discussion by intentionally bringing them to the fore, with an expansive exhibition and accompanying criticisms, but it also problematised the question of contemporary art coming from a Westernised geo-cultural perspective regardless of, or even because of, a viewpoint that was likened to the curator-as-anthropologist. As Gavin Jantjes pointed out at the time:

> 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' laid open the Western/Eurocentric consciousness like a surgeon dissecting his own body without an anaesthetic. It revealed that the Eurocentric gaze has distinct and daunting problems when fixed upon the 'cultural other', its achievements and methodologies. To imply that quality in the cultural arena is signified by everyone exhibiting together is both illusionistic and historically unsound.[203]

Many of the issues raised by 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' are still in evidence today, no more so than in relation to the globalising effects of biennials and large-scale international exhibitions, in which material from different parts of the world is brought together to form one cohesive exhibition (often with multiple display locations, galleries or scattered exhibition spaces).[204] Okwui Enwezor suggests that one of the key accomplishments of 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' was that it shifted discourse around contemporary art and globalisation from the stable site of the museum and art institution towards more temporary contexts, thus contributing to the creation of new methodological approaches and greater discursive flexibility.[205] James Meyer claimed

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[202] See my interviews with each of these curators in Appendix One.

[203] See Jantjes, Gavin. 'Red Rags to a Bull', *The Other Story: Afro-Asian Artists in Post-War Britain*, Ed. Rasheed Araeen (London, Hayward Gallery, 1989). Exh. cat. unpaginated.

[204] For an analysis of the relationship between location, biennials and scattered-site exhibitions, see Doherty, Claire. 'Location, Location', op. cit. pp. 7-10. Also see Doherty, Claire. 'The New Situationists', *From Studio to Situation*, Ed. Claire Doherty (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2004), pp. 7-14.

[205] Okwui Enwezor sees 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' as a moment of hegemonic rupture within curatorial practice. In my interview with him, he stated:

> The eighties and before was the colonial – Jim Crow and apartheid days put together. It was completely acceptable to the curators of the period that contemporary art did not happen in places like Africa, Asia, South America or the

that one of the differences between 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' and subsequent exhibitions was the interim development of both postcolonial and globalisation theories, integrated into curatorial practice through large-scale exhibitions, in an attempt to politicise the exhibition itself, whereby curating becomes a form of social critique or even activism.[206]

It is also important to distinguish between Martin's approach to representations of 'otherness' – which applied the rhetoric of postmodernist 'pluralism' of the time – and the later postcolonial approaches of Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, et al. In 1985, Hal Foster argued that late capitalist society no longer relied on processes of standardisation in order to function successfully; instead, postmodern pluralism, in the guise of heterogeneity and difference, fitted well with an expanding global market because it placed emphasis on a wider autonomy of choice and the freedom of the consumer to select from an increasing number of commodities on display.[207] For Foster, the pretence of pluralism within popular consumer culture translated into cultural consumption. In this context, Martin could be seen to have applied a top-down pluralism, employing non-Western art as 'multiple forms of otherness as they emerge from differences in subjectivity... race and class, temporal (configurations of sensibility) and spatial geographic locations and dislocations.'[208] While opening up a radical prospect through an acknowledgment of the other, Martin

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Middle East. While much credit is given to 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' for breaking this hegemony, and I would concede its importance, the work of people like Rasheed Araeen and Gavin Jantjes is equally important. Put simply, globalisation transformed the myopia that previously ruled the judgments of curators. When curators of my generation began, against the better judgments of the gatekeepers, to show interest in a wide variety of artistic approaches, and biennials began taking place in so-called peripheral cities, the type of narcissism that previously dominated the art world had to come to an end. The insurgent discourse of postcolonial debate is another moment, and this remains vital for me in keeping sharp the distinctions amongst all of us working as curators today. The postcolonial is always my point of departure.
Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author, Bristol, 04/02/05, p. 2. See Appendix One: EN.

[206] See James Meyer's comments in the discussion 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', *Artforum*, Vol. XLII, (November, 2003), pp. 163-212 which was introduced by Tim Griffin and moderated by James Meyer with curators Francesco Bonami, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, Hans Ulrich Obrist, and artists Martha Rosler and Yinka Shonibare. For a recent study of art and globalisation, see Bydler, Charlotte. *The Global Artworld Inc: On the Globalisation of Contemporary Art*, (Uppsala, Uppsala Universitet, 2004) and, for an exhibition (curated by Philippe Vergne, Douglas Fogle and Olukemi Iiesanmi) that attempted to consider how the globalisation of cultural contexts impacts upon current forms of art practice, with artists selected from Brazil, China, India, Japan, South Africa, Turkey and the United States, see *How Latitudes Become Forms: Art in a Global Age*, Eds. Hou Hanru, Vasif Kortun and Philippe Vergne (Minneapolis, Walker Art Centre, 2003).

[207] Foster, Hal. 'Against Pluralism', *Recodings; Art, Spectacle, Cultural Politics*, (Seattle, Bay Press, 1985), pp. 13-32. See also Bhabha, Homi K. 'The Postcolonial and the Postmodern', *The Location of Culture*, (London, Routledge, 2006 (first published 1995)), pp. 245-282 and *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Eds. James Clifford and George E. Marcus (Berkeley, University of California, 1986), which implored anthropologists to reject authoritative, objective approaches to representing their subjects and consider new methods which could take account of the multiple voices of the subjects they were representing.

[208] See Huyssens, A. 'Mapping the Post-Modern', *New German Critique*, No. 33, (1980), p. 50.

ultimately reifies certain power relations by articulating a lack of political context. This is excused by an argument in favour of what David Harvey called 'the impenetrability of the other', akin to postmodernist thinking which 'tells us not only to accept but to revel in the fragmentation and the cacophony of voices through which the dilemmas of the modern world are understood.'[209] As such, Martin articulates cultural pluralism as the slippery criterion for inclusion, using fragments of other cultures as the 'objects of visual and sensual experience' and looking at them 'from the perspective of our [Western] culture.'[210] This, again, reiterates a postmodernist perspective which 'immediately shuts off those voices from access to more universal sources of power by ghettoizing them with an opaque otherness, the specificity of this or that language game.'[211] Instead of 'all the self-reflexive corrections that [he] tried to incorporate into [his] method',[212] Martin appears to accept what he calls an 'ethnocentric' vision as an inevitable side-effect of his pluralist approach. His perspective appears to be in-keeping with 'the superimposition of different worlds in many a postmodernist novel, worlds between which an incommunicative "otherness" prevails in a space of coexistence.'[213] In 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', Martin's ethnographic voice is heard the loudest, overriding any serious attempt at contextualising the heterogeneous elements within his narrative of a more pluralist world. It evokes Jean-François Lyotard's view of the postmodern as somewhere 'where there can be no difference between truth, authority and rhetorical seductiveness; he who has the smoothest tongue, or the raciest story has the power.'[214]

Martin's viewpoint stands in opposition to later postcolonial responses to selecting, displaying and narrating otherness through exhibition-making. For example, Okwui Enwezor argued for the obverse of the postmodernist tactic of 'relativizing historical transformations and contesting the lapses and prejudices of epistemological grand narratives.'[215] Instead, Enwezor's epistemological approach to 'postcoloniality' sought

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[209] See Harvey, David. *The Condition of Postmodernity*, (Oxford and Cambridge, MA, Basil Blackwell, 1989), p. 116.

[210] Jean-Hubert Martin cited in Buchloh, Benjamin. 'The Whole Earth Show', *Art in America*, (May, 1989), p 152.

[211] Harvey, David. op. cit. p. 117.

[212] Jean-Hubert Martin cited in Buchloh, Benjamin. op. cit. p. 211.

[213] Harvey, David. op. cit. pp. 113-114.

[214] Jean François Lyotard cited in Harvey, David. op. cit. p. 117. See also Lyotard, Jean-François. *The Postmodern Condition*, (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1985).

[215] Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box', *Documenta 11 _ Platform 5: The Catalogue*, (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2002), p. 45.

'to sublate and replace all grand narratives through new ethical demands on modes of historical interpretation.'[216] This distinction is most evident in Enwezor's analysis of his 'Documenta11'. While acknowledging 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' as a breakthrough moment in achieving a more inclusive exhibition model, he distanced himself from Martin's ethnographic and colonial approach, stating:

> Martin's project did, indeed, frame the problematic of the trans-national space of exhibition practice. I will say that 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in a way opened up a space for really articulating the relationship between the works made in the West and non-West. However, the problem of 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' was that it was still predicated on a very redundant view of who should be an artist in this 'other' space... It had a new colonialist eye... I don't think 'Documenta11' and 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' share anything at all in terms of methodology, in terms of curatorial interests, in terms of intellectual interests, in terms of historical questions, beyond the fact that we were really interested in the widest possible notion of where art is made and I think that is the case.[217]

For Catherine David, curator of 'Documenta X', the problem with 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' was that it reinforced the misconception of central and peripheral modernities, as well as representing this alternative to modernity as something that was exotic, archaic or anti-modern.[218] One of the explanations for this induced differentiation of periphery to centre was Martin's focus on the 'cultural' object, with little of the socio-political contexts of production provided for the viewer and little attention being given to the potential neo-colonialist subtext of the curatorial statement. While recognising that, without the margins, there is no centre and vice versa, Martin argued at the time that an ethnocentric and hegemonic criterion for the selection of practitioners from outside the West would be inevitable. He claimed that an 'objective, unacculturated' perspective or a 'decentred' point of view would be impossible and, in any case, unhelpful. Instead, he argued that looking at the 'cultured' object from the relativity of the West would incorporate a critical anthropological position into a trans-historical view on spirituality. Martin would, then, be the ethnographic explorer involved in the archaeology of the other.[219]

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[216] Ibid. p. 45.

[217] Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author, op. cit. pp. 6-7. See Appendix One: EN.

[218] See Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor and James Meyer's responses in 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', op. cit. pp. 152-163.

[219] See Jean-Hubert Martin interviewed by Benjamin Buchloh prior to the exhibition opening in Buchloh, Benjamin. op. cit. pp. 150-159.

As I have argued, Martin's trans-cultural curatorial approach arrived at a time when postmodernist theory was preoccupied as much with the notion of cultural pluralism as it was with the use of relativism as a means of contesting the grand narratives linked to Modernism – what Okwui Enwezor called 'Western postmoderism's rhetorical pretensions to plurality.'[220] Here, Fredric Jameson's argument for postmodernism 'not as a style, but rather as a cultural dominant: a conception which allows for the presence and coexistence of a range of very different, yet subordinate, features'[221] was, for Enwezor, a manipulative method of entry into the heterogeneous zones of postmodern culture. Predicated mainly on 'very different, yet subordinate features', they are allowed both 'presence' and 'coexistence' within culture, but only when the other is 'granted audience in order to speak the essential truths of their existence.'[222] Martin's curatorial methodology also fell into this trap, of showing other cultures coexisting as 'random difference',[223] with 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' as a colonialist form of 'curating cultures' which was as much about bringing the peculiarities and particularities of non-Western art into a universal relationship with a Westernised notion of the aesthetic, as it was about re-writing recent art history. As Gerardo Mosquera has argued, there will always be an asymmetrical relationship between 'curating cultures' and 'curated cultures', with trans-cultural curating used as another political tool operating within the same frame of canonical integration and totalisation via Westernisation principles.[224]

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[220] Enwezor, Okwui. 'Between Worlds: Postmodernism and African Artists in the Western Metropolis', *Reading the Contemporary: African Art from Theory to the Marketplace*, Eds. Olu Oguibe and Okwui Enwezor, (London, inIVA, 1999), p. 249.

[221] Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (London and New York, Verso, 1991), p. 4.

[222] Enwezor, Okwui. 'Between Worlds.' op. cit. p. 249.

[223] Ibid. p. 249.

[224] Mosquera, Gerardo. 'Some Problems in Transcultural Curating', *Global Visions: Towards a New Internationalism in the Visual Arts*, Ed. Jean Fisher (London, Kala Press, 1994), pp. 135-137.

2.2: Biennials, Large-Scale International Exhibitions and Global Curating in the 1990s

The exhibition convention – of maintaining a given set of power relations between art, display and reception – is particularly true of the large survey exhibitions that emerged during the 1990s, which John Miller called the 'blockbuster exhibition.'[225] 'Mega-exhibitions', with an international slant, tend to incorporate anachronistic elements – what Miller calls 'surplus frustration as a ritual in its own right'[226] – while recuperating dissent as part of the totality of the event, in which a 'cycle of raised expectations and quick disillusionment'[227] is both predictable and over-determined. Miller argues that the mega-exhibition is an ideological institution, reifying the social relations between artworks and spectator. As the explicit purpose of this kind of exhibition is to offer a comprehensive, demographic survey of artworks, its terms of discourse are pre-determined and preclude the possibility of being 'transformed in the course of art production and therefore subject to contradiction and conflict.'[228]

According to Miller, a critique of these exhibitions, on the basis of individual curatorial choices made within an established framework, is to ignore the ideologies underpinning such institutions as Documenta, or even the art industry as a whole.[229] Miller suggests that exhibitions such as 'Documenta 9', curated by Jan Höet in 1992, consider audiences as a concrete social constituency. There is a privileging of the curator's position as the leading author, naturalising the exhibition and its outcome as an organic inevitability within the institutional framework and supporting an illusion of curatorial inspiration

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[225] See Miller, John. 'THE SHOW YOU LOVE TO HATE: A psychology of the mega-exhibition', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 269. Miller argues that the ritual of experiencing art, as an organised, spectacular event, serves as a method of telling the viewer what is going on in an internationally-commensurable field. This experience is ritualised as a naturalised illusion supported by an overarching curatorial statement. The individual viewing experience is converted into the experience of a community of viewers, whereby the privileging of curatorial subjectivity in such cases configures a relatively tautological relationship between different works, rendering any critical potential outside this narrative impotent. Similarly, Carol Duncan suggested that spaces of display – from museums, to architectural spaces, to installations – are 'ritual structures' that utilise sequenced spaces, lighting and the arrangements of objects and prescribe formalised ways of behaving to participants, viewers and visitors alike. In Duncan's specific analysis of the museum setting, she argues that such spaces achieve a ritualising effect through their marked-off, liminal zones of space and time, in which visitors are invited to perform a script or scenario that has been dictated to them by the museum's setting, its architectural symbolism and its display dynamics. See Duncan, Carol. *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (Oxon, Routledge, 1995), pp. 7-20.

[226] Ibid. p. 270.

[227] Ibid. p. 270.

[228] Ibid. p. 270.

[229] Ibid. pp. 270-272.

and genius.[230] The curator becomes the most conspicuously responsible subject within the institutional mechanism, for the production and mediation of exhibitions of art as statements on global culture.[231] As Francesco Bonami admitted in 2001, 'The role of the curator today involves such enormous geographical diversity that the curator is now a kind of visual anthropologist – no longer just a taste maker, but a cultural analyst.'[232]

Within an ever-increasing number of biennials and large-scale temporary exhibition-events, contemporary curating transcends geographical boundaries and looks to global networks of cultural production for its source material. Demarcating a space for dialogue and diverse artistic and cultural exchange, the large-scale exhibition model provides an efficient strategy for the articulation and consolidation of an international art economy, or, as Thomas McEvilley noted, 'the Biennial is the type of cultural event that tends to arise when some form of capitalism is undergoing colonial expansion in pursuit of foreign markets.' [233]Globalisation in the context of the Grand Exhibition[234] appears via the art *world* – an ostensibly unified place in which creative and cultural differences can be integrated while retaining a diversity of identities in co-existence with each other. In many cases, the biennial model seemingly bolsters a definition of globalisation as a benign, accelerated 'process which embodies a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations... generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks.'[235] Exemplifying this process, the biennial is presented as an inevitable product of the contemporary global condition. The biennial formulates the world as an amalgamation of different cultures, times and places, all brought together as

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[230] Ibid. p. 272.

[231] As I have already argued in Chapter One, Seth Siegelaub et al. called for a 'de-mystification' of the exhibiting process and for greater transparency about the curatorial selection process, which has evolved into the 'supervisibility' of the curatorial position. When the mechanics of cultural production are made visible, through mediated representations, and when the social relations produced through cultural activity are made more transparent, it does not necessarily provide greater possibilities for effective participation or public response. As Peggy Phelan rightly pointed out – in Phelan, Peggy. *Unmarked – The Politics of Performance*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1993) – this degree of visibility can act as a trap that summons voyeurism, fetishism, surveillance and an appetite for possession. It can be as much a re-mystification as a de-mystification of those responsible for cultural production.

[232] Bonami, Francesco. 'Statement', *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum*, Ed. Carin Kuoni (New York, Independent Curators International (ICI), 2001), p. 32.

[233] McEvilley, Thomas. 'Fusion: Hot or Cold', Oguibe and Enwezor, op. cit. p. 308.

[234] I use the term 'Grand' here not only because of the implied scale of such exhibitions but also because of its allusion to the 18th century Grand Tour. This has led to the idea of modern world travel as an essentially cultured activity, associated with anthropology, the acquisition of knowledge and the translation of such experiences into exhibition/representational forms.

[235] See 'Introduction', Held and McGrew, op. cit. p. 51.

a combined representation of 'time and space compression',[236] 'global integration', 'accelerated interdependence', 'consciousness raising of the global condition' and 'inter-regional power relations.'[237] Artists from all over the world are assembled and their work is displayed inside the framework of a global exhibition-event, as one way of mediating an expanded and inclusive overview of the whole world to an audience at one place/location/city.

As Thomas Boutoux identified, throughout the 1990s the contemporary art world embraced 'the global' as a coherent phenomenon that could be used to integrate artistic production previously beyond the Western art historical canon.[238] Curating in the context of international biennials assumed a unique position of both 'reflecting globalism as a reality and adopting it as an idea or theme.'[239] Such exhibitions performed the function of bringing together a variety of artistic contexts to co-exist at the same site or location and, despite any curatorial self-reflexivity that may exist towards the global effects of 'biennialisation', the periphery continues to follow the discourse of the centre. In the case of biennials, the periphery comes to the centre in search of legitimisation and, by default, accepts the conditions of this legitimacy.[240] Charles Esche suggests that the globalisation of art within large-scale exhibitions has, through a process of standardisation, absorbed the difference between centre and periphery. According to Esche, the 'centre first' model of global art, largely begun in 1989, still holds sway over much of museum and biennial culture. It requires 'the key institutions of contemporary culture officially to sanction the "periphery" in order to subsume it into the canon of innovative visual art.'[241] Even though many of the artists in each exhibition may have developed their practice on the fringes of the recognised art

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[236] David Harvey characterises 'time-space compression' as a speeding-up of human interrelations, when the time it takes to travel between disparate locations has decreased so dramatically that it has resulted in an effective shrinkage of geographical distance, and the temporalities of communication to the point where 'the present is all there is.' Harvey describes 'compression' as our overwhelming sense of the spatial and temporal worlds, whereby 'space appears to shrink to a "global village" of telecommunications and a "spaceship earth" of economic and ecological interdependencies.' See Harvey, David. op. cit. p. 240.

[237] Held, David and McGrew, Anthony. 'The Great Globalization Debate: An Introduction', Held and McGrew, op. cit. p. 3. See pp. 1-45 for their reading of these terms. See also Wuggenig, Ulf. 'The Empire, the Northwest and the Rest of the World. "International Contemporary Art" in the Age of Globalization', located at http://www.republicart.net/disc/mundial/wuggenig02_en.htm (accessed 10/01/07).

[238] Boutoux, Thomas. 'A Tale of Two Cities: Manifesta in Rotterdam and Ljubljana', Vanderlinden and Filipovic op. cit. p. 202.

[239] Ibid. p. 203.

[240] Esche, Charles. 'Debate: Biennials', *frieze*, 92, (June/July/August, 2005), p. 105.

[241] Ibid. p. 105.

world, 'their energy is validated and consumed by the centre and therefore the relationship between rim and hub remains in place. This is, of course, how globalisation generally operates – sometimes to the economic benefit of the patronised but rarely in the interests of maintaining their autonomy and sustainability.'[242]

Within large-scale international art exhibitions, often configured as biennials and triennials, curators pushed for a greater level of inclusion of artistic practices from beyond the established Western centres of art, and previously marginalised cultural activities, realigning the art world on a more global scale than ever before. Although many such exhibitions acknowledged the impossibility of presenting a total world-view, many curators regard this limitation as a fundamentally productive aspect of the global condition at their disposal. Catherine David describes 'showing or putting emphasis on the limits of what I call the borders of an exhibition, meaning that, at the end of the twentieth century... you can't deal with the whole world so you have to make it understandable that you have certain black spots.'[243] David attests that her 'Documenta X' 'was really supposed to emphasise the impossibilities, or certain limitations, of a global view these days.'[244] Here, the limits of the exhibition form are utilised as a vehicle for mediating the complexities of any unified global representation, while showing how 'impossibility' and 'limitation' can be considered productive terms of engagement for the curator working within an international context. Equally, such exhibitions demonstrate how diverse creative activities can co-exist with the modalities of different cultures, represented together in one site of display, akin to an organic global co-operation. As Hou Hanru has stated:

> What I tried to do in exhibitions like 'Cities on the Move', and especially 'Zone of Urgency', was to create a kind of overlapping of different systems, which represented different speeds, different spatialities in the world. In some parts, you can see some quiet corners and, in others, there are more speedy spaces, while others are more implicit and all these things have to be woven together like an organic body.[245]

This notion of an exhibition, as an 'organic body' of 'overlapping' differences, accords with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's description of globalisation as an 'inexorable

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[242] Ibid. p. 105.

[243] David, Catherine. Interview with the author, Paris, 14/04/05, pp. 8-9. See Appendix One: DA.

[244] Ibid. p. 14.

[245] Hou, Hanru. Interview with the author, Paris, 26/01/04. p. 5. See Appendix One: HO.

and irreversible' process of economic and cultural regulation of exchange that is assigned to a new, sovereign global power that they call Empire.[246] According to one of their central arguments about this new global condition, in 'contrast to imperialism, Empire establishes no territorial centre of power and does not rely on fixed boundaries or barriers.'[247] Instead, it has 'materialised' as 'a *decentered* and *deterritorializing* apparatus of rule that expressively incorporates the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers.'[248] To counteract this, Hardt and Negri posit the emergence of the plural 'multitude' of 'productive, creative subjectivities of globalization' that have learned to 'form constellations of singularities and events that impose continual global reconfigurations of the system.'[249] The 'multitude' is put forward by Negri and Hardt as a 'political subject, as posse' that 'begins to appear on the world scene' as a 'biopolitical self-organization', made up of cooperative and convergent subjects who are taking responsibility for directing and managing 'immaterial' modes of production, social work and creative action.[250] The 'multitude' re-imagines the working classes as a heterogeneous group of migrant workers, socio-cultural movements and cooperative networks, offering some forms of collaborative resistance to the global hegemonic power of Empire. According to Hardt and Negri, this resistance is achieved by virtue of its ability to perpetually mobilise itself geographically and ontologically. In the process of creating new subjectivities, populations and social constituencies, and by its ability to be continually in motion 'the creative movement of the multitude'[251] produces new 'modulations of form and processes of mixture and hybridisation.'[252] The 'multitude' can be 'conceived as a network: an open and expansive network in which all differences can be expressed freely and equally, a network that provides the means of encounter so that we can work and live in common.'[253] In the context of the biennial, art originating

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[246] For Hardt and Negri, 'Empire' is that which controls territories, markets, populations and the entirety of social life which has come to replace imperialism as the domain of actions and activities. 'Multitude' is the term they employ as that which is proposed as a counter-model to the homogenising and totalising forces of Empire. See Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *Empire*, (Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 2000), pp. xi-xvii. See also Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *The Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, (New York, Penguin Group, 2004) and Virno, Paola. *A Grammar of the Multitude: For an Analysis of Contemporary Forms of Life*, (Los Angeles & New York, Semiotext(e), 2004).

[247] Ibid. p. xii.

[248] Ibid. p. xii. Italics in original.

[249] Ibid. p. 60.

[250] Ibid. pp. 410-11.

[251] Ibid. p. 62.

[252] Ibid. p. 60.

[253] Hardt, Michael and Negri, Antonio. *The Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*, op. cit. pp. xiii-xiv.

from different cultures and global information networks is collectively put forward as a kind of critical 'multitude', expressed as a centrally-organised and globally-connected sphere of operations appropriate to the *modus operandi* of large-scale international exhibitions. As Carlos Basualdo has stated, biennials can be 'seen as an opportunity for a wider reflection in which, of course, art is a very significant component...'[254] and where art might be '...the point of departure or the point of arrival – you are really dealing with much more complex system[s] in which you are also trying to deal with the connection, the dialogue between the arts and other aspects of cultural production.'[255]

Recent examples of biennials supporting a vision of cultural globalism, as an inevitable, productive and decentralising apparatus, have appeared in many guises. Ute Meta Bauer's understanding of the space of 'Documenta11' in 2002, relied heavily on Hardt and Negri's idea of the multitude – as connected 'fragments', interrelated like a 'rhizome that branches into a whole that is not immediately perceptible' where 'a stratification of forms of exchange that emphasizes the principle of manifold connections...of diversity, of multiplicité.'[256] Similarly, with Catherine David's 'Documenta X' in 1999, an attempt has been made to propose an enlarged, expansive and recentralised view of art, history and the art world, whereby 'the extreme heterogeneity of contemporary aesthetic practices and mediums – matched by a plurality of contemporary exhibition spaces' would be used to 'provide a multiplicity' representing the shifts and redefinitions that have 'become manifest with the process of globalisation.'[257]

'Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer – the 50th Venice Biennale', curated by Francesco Bonami in 2003, was proposed as an expression of 'glomanticism' somewhere between 'Globality and Romanticism, where economics and information finally intersect within the complexity of an individual identity and emotions.'[258]

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[254] Basualdo, Carlos. Interview with the author, Venice, 10/06/05, p. 9. See Appendix One: BA.

[255] Ibid. p. 9.

[256] Bauer, Ute Meta. 'The Space of Documenta11', *Documenta 11 _ Platform 5: The Catalogue*, op. cit. p. 105. For a definition of the term 'rhizome' see Deleuze, Gilles and Guattari, Félix. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, (London, Athlone Press, 1988), trans. Brian Massumi, pp. 3-26. See also Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, op. cit. pp. 393-413.

[257] See David, Catherine. 'Introduction', *Documenta X: Short Guide*, (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 1999), pp.11-12.

[258] Bonami, Francesco. 'I Have a Dream', *50th Biennale di Venezia: Dreams and Conflicts – The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, Eds. Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa (Venice, Edizioni La Biennale di Venezia and Marsilio Editori, 2003), pp.xxi-xxii.

Bonami described the results of his analysis of the state of globalisation and contemporary art as a global exhibition in which 'a polyphony of voices and ideas' came together to represent 'a new network of cultural expressions, which are less dogmatic and more spiritual.'[259]

Likewise, the nomadic European biennial Manifesta, the biennials of Berlin, Tirana and Istanbul and the many peripheral biennials established during the 1990s have all tended to employ a trans-national approach, with local artistic production being taken as their main point of departure.[260] Bringing a diverse group of artists from different parts of the world together in one location is a means of considering global exchanges and communications through a unified exhibition of differences, where one can 'imagine a planet in which all points are interconnected in a reticular network.'[261] By bringing diverse cultures together in one global exhibition, the curator, or curators, exhibit what James Clifford called, an 'interpretive anthropology', whereby cultures are proposed as 'assemblages of texts', intended to challenge 'ethnographic authority' by setting up more 'discursive paradigms of dialogue and polyphony' within one main text – that of the exhibition as text.[262] Likewise, such a methodology invokes Bourdieu's challenge to the structuralist version of the textual model, with its capacity to reduce 'social relations to communicative relations and, more precisely, to decoding operations.'[263] When a particular curatorial narrative, or art world view, is transposed onto diverse practices, a 'recoding of practice as discourse'[264] occurs, with the exhibition as the principal text and the curator providing the most prominent narrative through which alignments can be made between selected works.

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[259] Ibid. p.xxii.

[260] Although I acknowledge the historical and cultural significance of established biennials – such as São Paulo, SITE Sante Fe and Sydney – they have only been a cursory aspect of my investigation. For the sake of critical focus, I have primarily dealt with biennial exhibitions that I have experienced first hand during the period under discussion.

[261] Mosquera, Gerardo. 'Some Problems in Transcultural Curating.' op. cit. p. 133.

[262] See Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture*, (Cambridge, Harvard University, 1988), p. 41. Clifford's text looks at the commonality between new models of anthropology and new historicism in the late 1980s which he identified as a recurring tendency towards 'ethnographic self-fashioning.' Extending his notion of the ethnographer as a type of storyteller, a provider of fictional texts, he stated 'every ethnographer [is] something [of] a surrealist, a reinventor and [a] reshuffler of realities.' p. 147. I am not suggesting that every biennial curator follows the ethnographic approach outlined by Clifford but, in many cases, the curator does seem to take on the authoritative role of narrative provider, with his/her view of the (art)world acting as the lynchpin of most large-scale international biennials since 'Les Magiciens de la Terre.'

[263] Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 1.

[264] Ibid. p. 1.

Acknowledgement of the anthropological turn being taken in the contemporary art world occurred in the 1990s under the aegis of Hal Foster, whose term, 'Artist as Ethnographer' was employed to describe an all-encompassing paradigm which utilised fieldwork methodology traditionally associated with anthropological research. Culture, or cultures, began to be treated as objects of study, understood as an entity, or entitites, that could be selected, and reorganised by the researcher, who then conceives and presents a project based on their findings.[265] For Foster, the 'Artist as Ethnographer' is, typically, a sanctioned authority coming from outside of the local culture with which s/he is engaging. While producing their (self-)representation from the outside, Foster argues, 'the quasi-anthropological role set up for the artist [and curator] can promote a presuming as much as a questioning of ethnographic authority.'[266] In the context of the global curator as anthropologist, the other, as defined by the dominant culture, becomes 'objectified once again' in order to satisfy what Miwon Kwon called 'the contemporary lust for authentic histories and identities.'[267] As Johanne Lamoureux later proposed, trans-cultural curating, as a method of 'gathering' cultures together, runs the risk of 'possible fetishization of otherness, which also manifested, on the curator's part, a definite claim of authorship over its contents, a claim that challenged – despite the expected denials – the locus of artistic enunciation insofar as it displaced the focus of the individual works to the very project of their gathering in an exhibition.'[268] This was mirrored in Enwezor's observation of the shift of power from critic to curator in the 1990s which, he argued, was not only 'a consequence of the proliferation of museums, blockbuster exhibitions and biennials, but also the proliferation of other forms of mega exhibitions. Exhibitions have become legitimate mediums for art as the novel has been for fiction.'[269]

As part of a dominant Western European and American internationalism, the expanding network of biennials has effectively embraced art and artists from the peripheries but, as

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[265] See also Foster, Hal. *The Return of the Real: The Avant-Garde at the End of the Century*, (Cambridge, MA and London, MIT Press, 1996), pp. 171-203.

[266] Ibid. p. 197. See also Kwon, Miwon. *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity*, (Cambridge, MA, and London, MIT Press, 2004), pp. 138-139.

[267] Ibid. pp. 138-139.

[268] Lamoureux, Johanne. op. cit.

[269] Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author. op cit. p. 16. See Appendix One: EN.

Jessica Bradley argued, these exhibitions function as more responsive and spectacular means of distribution:

> [O]ne that can efficiently meet the accelerated rate of exchange and consumption parallel to the global flow of capital and information today... while curatorial aspirations are frequently concerned with addressing cultures in flux and eschew[ing] cultural nationalism, the motives for establishing these events may nevertheless reside in a desire to promote and validate local, culturally specific production within a global network.[270]

The interrelations between culture and location are the most obviously-marketable aspects of global tourism upon which biennials depend. Locality – embodied in the promotion of tourist spots, local specialities, sites, culture and produce – is the most reliable generator of economic revenue for many local communities, and it is no coincidence that the proliferation of biennials has coincided with the growth of globalisation. As Gilane Tawadros stated, art has become part of a:

> ...globalised economy with the necessity for new markets, with the growth of new markets to sell work, but also of new products, to continue to fuel and invigorate existing markets, not to mention all the regeneration of cities and the way that art is being used and biennales in particular, and festivals of art, are used as a form of accumulating cultural capital, as a strategy for cities...[271]

Biennials are, first of all, spectacles which function as potential commodities for the local tourist industry. As Hou Hanru argues, such dependence on a tourist economy causes a loss of what Fredric Jameson identified as necessary 'distance of critique'.[272] Ivo Mesquita also argues that, during these times of 'culture as spectacle', artistic production acts as a catalyst for globalised culture, attracting financial investments and audiences. Biennials (and art fairs) are happening in more and more cities, which have adopted cultural tourism as a means of securing a place in the international arena of economy and culture. There, artists, curators, critics, art dealers, patrons and sponsors nurture a clearly-defined production system, through labour division, which produces hierarchical roles for the participants.[273]

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[270] Bradley, Jessica. 'International Exhibitions: A Distribution System for a New Art World Order', Townsend, op. cit. p. 89.

[271] Tawadros, Gilane. Interview with the author, London, 30/03/06, p. 4. See Appendix One: TA.

[272] See Hou, Hanru. 'Towards a New Locality: Biennials and "Global Art"', Vanderlinden and Filipovic, op. cit. p. 56.

[273] See Mesquita, Ivo. op. cit. pp. 63- 67.

As important agents within the global cultural industry, a new kind of international curator – identified by Ralph Rugoff in 1999 as a 'jet-set *flâneur*'[274] – has emerged: one who appears to know no geographical boundaries and for whom globalism and new internationalism are the two central issues.[275] Such mobile cultural subjects operate as mediators, or intermediary agents, of certain forms of representation, within a given exhibition context and the superstructure of the international cultural economy. In particular, in large-scale exhibitions, their role is to take responsibility for the selection and display of international art, through a visible framing device, a subjective (curatorial) system of mediation which has the notion of inclusivity as one of its central tenets.

Internationalism remains at the core of the biennial industry, with an accompanying discourse validating the superstructure of the art world on a much broader scale than ever before. Biennial curators are usually well travelled, with their exhibitions plugged into complex global knowledge networks, which traverse and overlap each other through a common (globalised) curatorial discourse. Each large-scale exhibition functions as a fleeting place of exchange within this ongoing dialogue, whereby exhibitions produced within a biennial context are discussed in relation to each other, their predecessors, and their contemporaries, as well as the world they mirror.[276] For example, in 2002, Okwui Enwezor claimed that 'Documenta11' recognised the limits of all models of large-scale exhibitions, which had sought to be truly international, inclusive and global, but often ended up maintaining a separation between publics and disciplinary models.[277] Instead, 'Documenta11' would express the limits of Documenta, as an institution of global stature, by having a 'multitude'[278] of intersections and public

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[274] See Rugoff, Ralph. 'Rules of the Game', *frieze*, 44, (January/February, 1999), pp. 47-49.

[275] I use the term 'new internationalism' here, as defined by Gilane Tawadros, as a configuration of 'a global projection of the idea of cultural pluralism, or multiculturalism, as it has been formed in the West' and beyond 'as a network of interrelations and exchanges across the globe in terms of artistic discourse.' See Tawadros, Gilane. 'New Internationalism', Fisher, op. cit. p. 4 and p. 11.

[276] For example, see 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', op. cit. pp. 152-163, the issue of *MJ – Manifesta Journal: Biennials*, No.2, (Winter 2003/Spring 2004), or many of the essays in Vanderlinden and Filipovic, op. cit.

[277] See Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box', op. cit. pp. 42-56.

[278] I use the term 'multitude', as Enwezor himself refers to it, as derived from Hardt and Negri's use of the term as a resistant force opposed to the power of Empire. See Hardt and Negri, op. cit. p. xv. Throughout the catalogue *Documenta 11 _ Platform 5*, Enwezor sets up a dialogue with 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', inviting comparison between the two exhibition models. For him, Jean-Hubert Martin, as an anthropological curator, showed a subjective, single-handed approach to exhibiting the other, in which distance and notions of the exotic were inflated. By contrast, Enwezor was more interested in an 'anthropology of proximity', where the exhibition would give advocacy to a multitude of voices, valorising the wandering, nomadic, hybrid producer. See Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box,' op. cit. and Greenberg, Reesa. 'Identity Exhibitions: From Magiciens de la Terre to Documenta11', *Art Journal*, Vol. 61,

sphere relations collectively 'deterritorialising' and exacerbating 'modernism's strategy of differentiation and homogenisation, its reification of pure objects of art in relation to value and hierarchy within the artistic canons.'[279] One year later, Francesco Bonami suggested that 'Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer – the 50th Venice Biennale' attempted to create a new Grand Exhibition for the 21st century, in which multiplicity, fragmentation and diversity could co-exist within the exhibition, while reflecting the complexity of the contemporary global condition beyond it.[280]

Large-scale exhibitions have continued to embrace cultural pluralism as their standard, while producing a fragmented experience of the world through trans-cultural, non-linear, a-historical group exhibitions. As Martha Rosler has pointed out, although curatorial themes may change from one exhibition to the next, the question of inclusion does not. It is one of the constants that accompany any biennial, where the 'global exhibitions serve as grand collectors and translators of subjectivities under the latest phase of globalisation.'[281] Rosler proposed that, although artists may be selected on the basis of their identity, their difference or their peripheral geopolitical position, there must be an aesthetic surplus from the First World to maintain the equilibrium of proportional representation.[282] The globalised cultural sector does not necessarily behave any differently from global capitalism; in fact, it often mimics it. For Marcus Verhagen, this often expresses itself as a failed expectation, whereby biennial visitors expect a progressive model of globalisation in the cultural sphere, but are instead greeted by 'biennials [that] are manifestations of a different kind of globalisation, one that is driven not so much by ecumenical curatorial designs as by existing mechanisms of centralisation and dissemination.' The 'biennial remains a crucial node in a larger network that is entirely penetrated by the market; to isolate any one institution is to

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No. 1, (Spring, 2005), pp. 90-94 and Johanne Lamoureux's analysis of the dialogue between the two exhibitions, op. cit. For Lamoureux, 'Documenta11' had a reflexivity that allowed the politics of representation (associated with the Western cultural explorer) to flip around and articulate a representation of politics, something she argues Martin's approach failed to address because of its unwillingness to engage in the politics of discourse beyond the exhibition. For other reviews of 'Documenta11' see: Gibbs, Michael. 'Documenta 11/1', *Art Monthly*, No. 258, (July-August, 2002), pp. 1-5; Lapp, Alex. 'Documenta11/2', *Art Monthly*, No. 258, (July-August, 2002), pp. 7-10; Hoffmann, Jens. 'Reentering Art, Reentering Politics', *Flash Art*, 34, No. 106, (July-September, 2002), p. 106; Gioni, Massimiliano. 'Finding the Centre', *Flash Art*, 34, No. 106, (July-September, 2002), pp. 106-07.

[279] Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box', op. cit. p. 53.

[280] Bonami, Francesco. 'I Have a Dream', op. cit. p. xix.

[281] Martha Rosler cited in 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', op. cit. p. 154.

[282] Ibid. p. 161.

present a distorted picture of the art world... the biennial as a whole can't aspire to a cogent assessment of globalisation because it is wholly shaped by global pressures.'[283]

2.3: The Global White Cube

In 2005, Elena Filipovic argued that biennials and other large-scale perennial exhibitions have configured a new kind of sanitised exhibition space.[284] Filipovic categorised biennials as the new 'global white cube' – discussed and critiqued as if they were autonomous entities, isolated from the physical environments immediately beyond their parameters.[285] In spite of the multiplicity of creative voices within each biennial, this portrayal of the exhibition, as a hermetic space, persists. The work of the curator continues to be mediated and discussed with a focus upon what the exhibition contains only inasmuch as it corresponds with the curatorial objective.[286] Filipovic supports her argument by suggesting that biennials overwhelmingly employ established museums – often purpose-built Modernist display spaces – in the host cities. There, artworks are shown in specially-constructed settings that replicate the rigid geometrics of the Modernist 'white cube', with white walls, compartmentalised sections and a lack of windows to the world outside.[287] There is a privileging of the exhibition as the predominant form, where 'the selection of artworks, a tectonic context, and thematic or other discursive accompaniments coalesce into a particular form... at [the] heart of *how an exhibition* exhibits.'[288] This contributes to an articulation of the biennial as a particular physical space with its own parameters, 'through which relations between viewers and objects, between one object and others, and between objects, viewers, and their specific exhibition context are staged.'[289]

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[283] Verhagen, Marcus. 'Biennale Inc.', *Art Monthly*, No. 287, (June, 2005), pp. 1-4.

[284] See Filipovic, Elena. 'The Global White Cube', Vanderlinden and Filipovic, op. cit. pp. 63-84.

[285] Ibid. pp. 63-84.

[286] Ibid. pp. 63-84.

[287] Ibid. pp. 63-84. Italics in original.

[288] Ibid. p. 79.

[289] Ibid. p. 79.

At the core of curatorial activity remains the ability to situate a given work of art within a social, historical and cultural context and to write about it factually, informatively and critically. Curators working within the expanded field of an international network of exhibitions are no longer hidden behind the scenes. Instead, they are often treated as if they possess a unique approach to the organisation of material and spatial culture. Amongst others, Ralph Rugoff and Patrick Murphy have criticised this tendency towards a more globalised, multicultural and, in their view, ultimately subjective approach to curatorial practice whereby curators often employ artists as representations of cultural identities.[290] When we consider the visibility of art communities and individual artists on the biennial circuit, this view now appears to be oversimplified and outdated. An example of this is the increased exposure of contemporary Chinese artists and the role played by curator Hou Hanru in consolidating their presence in large-scale exhibitions since 'Cities on the Move' (co-curated with Hans Ulrich Obrist in 1997) and his involvement in advancing the biennials in Shanghai and Gwangju.[291]

The gradual displacement of the curator, from cultural arbiter to cultural mediator, within global exhibitions has meant that curators have explicated artistic practices which have traditionally been subordinated, submerged or lacking in visibility in Western art discourse. The focus on certain artistic practices as representative of particular communities has, in turn, shown that these communities have played a vital role in the artistic process, offering an increased level of visibility to the communities involved in this process and to their places of production. According to Iwona Blazwick, pluralism – which she attaches to postmodernism – was an important political phenomenon because 'what it seeks to dismantle is a single unitary subject position, that position which is white, male, heterosexual and Euro-America-centric.'[292] According to Zygmunt Bauman, it was precisely the end of the Grand Narrative, and the absence of a single, universally-accepted authority within contemporary culture, that has caused curators to become scapegoats, 'because the curator is on the front line of a big battle for meaning under conditions of uncertainty.'[293] During this period of criticality, Bauman perceives

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[290] See Rugoff, Ralph. op. cit. pp. 47-49 and Murphy, Patrick. 'Spiralling Open', *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*, Ed. Mika Hannula (Helsinki, NIFCA, 1998), pp. 184-189.

[291] For a survey of Hou Hanru's curatorial practice, see his selected writings: Hou, Hanru. *On The Mid-Ground*, Ed. Yu Hsiao-Hwei (Hong Kong, Timezone 8, 2002). See also *Cities on the Move*, Eds. Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 1997).

[292] Blazwick, Iwona. 'Now Here – Work in Progress', Hannula, op. cit. p. 15.

[293] Zygmunt Bauman called 'the event of the exhibition' a moment in which the 'artistic experience' is evaluated and mapped out as a one-off event according to the 'volume of the potential' of each experienced event. See Bauman, Zygmunt. 'On Art, Death

art as having been re-centred on what he calls 'the event of the exhibition', where the experience of art is generated primarily by short-lived events and only secondarily, if at all, 'by the extemporal value of the work of art itself. It is mostly the work of art exhibited in a widely publicized event that meets the standards set for the proper object of consumption, that stand the chance of maximising the shock while avoiding the risk of boredom', which would strip it of its 'entertainment value.'[294]

There exists a fluctuating list of such 'temporary-event-exhibitions', operating within the global exhibition market under the various guises of the biennial model, ranging from the undisputed Venice Biennale, Documenta, the Carnegie International, or the Bienal São Paulo to the newly-established Göteborg and Tirana Biennales. It is fair to say that each biennial is unique, with each of these exhibitions varying in their scale, objectives, local priorities and levels of visibility (nationally and internationally). But, what they all have in common is an ambition to boost local cultural activity within a global context and, in turn, to contribute to the designation of a new geography for international art, its curation and reception. In what Barbara Vanderlinden and Elena Filipovic call the 'biennial phenomenon', large-scale international exhibitions reflect the cultural diversity of global artistic practices and call into question the inertia of institutions too slow or unwilling to respond to such praxis.[295]

Biennials have become a form of institution in and of themselves and, because of their regularity, have produced an index of comparability. On the one hand, these exhibition-events have helped shape new socio-cultural and political relations in a globalised world. On the other hand, they have become polarising spaces for the legitimation of certain forms of artistic and curatorial praxis within the global culture industry. At their most effective, they engage with politics as a cultural, rather than institutional, practice.

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and Postmodernity – And what they do to each other,' Hannula, op. cit. p. 31. Exhibitions are framed both as specific, readable texts and as discursive events, which are not dependent on, or confined to, the art within them or by their interior aesthetic contents. Treating each exhibition as an event that is discussed in relation to other exhibitions with similar objectives, and to issues that go beyond the aesthetic merits of the art therein, enables subjects to be addressed that go beyond questions of value to include cultural identity, globalism, ethics, politics and sexuality. This is an understanding of exhibitions that departs from what Reesa Greenberg defines as 'a text: a spatial text laid out in three dimensions; a temporally finite text with fixed points of commencement and closure; a thematic or narrative text; a text incorporating hegemonic or subversive metatexts; and in all instances, a text "read" by viewers.' Instead, it includes what Greenberg called 'an exhibition as discursive event [which] demands awareness of an exhibition's underlying structures and unpredictable repercussions.' See Greenberg, Reesa. 'The Exhibition as Discursive Event', *Longing and Belonging: From the Faraway Nearby*, (Santa Fe, SITE Sante Fe, 1995), pp. 120-125.

[294] Ibid. p. 13.

[295] See Vanderlinden and Filipovic, op. cit. pp. 13-20.

As Susan Buck-Morss suggested: 'They ought to show themselves as an exercise of freedom and of that which this freedom sets in motion, thus retrieving the tradition of those artistic practices that endeavoured to create a space for culture, a space that shuns instrumentalisation.'[296]

Very few biennials operate on the scale of Documenta, Johannesburg, Venice or even Istanbul. Many tend to be improvised, localised and modest in what they intend to achieve, but it is the specific homogeneity produced by the biennial condition that is of interest here and not the heterogeneity of the myriad localised cultural statements. Setting aside the distinguishing issues of scale, temporality and/or locality, the transformation of curatorial practice made manifest by such exhibitions is mainly articulated by biennial curators as an overtly politicised, discursive and essentially positive effect of globalism. As Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun, curators of the '9th International Istanbul Biennial' (2005), claimed, it has been the biennial exhibition model that has driven much of the art world's global expansion, since 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in 1989.[297] Biennials have become the vehicle on the international art circuit through which much art is validated and acquires its value. For Esche and Kortun, the forum of the biennial allows curators to 'energise vision and discipline the imagination.' Unlike a fixed institutional post, which plays a more pivotal role in the local context, curatorial vision within biennials can shape the way in which we form an understanding of global culture.[298] Biennials are devices through which art can interpret the world for its viewers.

Esche and Kortun are not alone in their regard for the biennial as a tool that can 'identify and define a position for art in the public consciousness and create the conditions from which it can be further explored.'[299] Hans Ulrich Obrist referred to the biennial as a 'catalyst'[300] which can activate multiple temporalities, where 'the necessity for the coexistence of several time zones in exhibitions enables a great variety of different contact zones.'[301] Where the biennial appears as a tool for Esche and Kortun

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[296] Susan Buck-Morss quoted in Mesquita, op. cit. p. 66.

[297] Esche, Charles and Kortun, Vasif. 'The World is Yours', *Art, City and Politics in an Expanding World: Writings From the 9th International Istanbul Biennial*, (Istanbul, Istanbul Kültür Sanat Vakfi, 2005), pp. 24-25.

[298] Ibid. pp. 24-25.

[299] Ibid. pp. 24-25.

[300] Obrist, Hans Ulrich. Interview with the author, Paris, 20/04/06. p. 8. See Appendix One: OB.

[301] Ibid. p. 6.

and works as a catalyst for Obrist, for Ute Meta Bauer it is one of the rare opportunities left in the art world for curators to make a 'bigger statement to get heard. It's not to show off, but to get certain issues finally across...'[302] on a much larger scale than the majority of curated exhibitions. This leaves the biennial model open to the kind of spectacularisation that Bauer alluded to when she described her experience of curating biennials as a possibility that had to be used 'to make a point...' which is 'to a certain extent, spectacular or very controversial, to stick out. Even as curator you are expected to provide a charismatic or eccentric personality.'[303]

2.4: Global Curating in the 21st Century

By looking at the changes in curatorial discourse relating to significant exhibitions – from 'Primitivism' (1984) to 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' (1989) to 'Documenta11' (2002) – Christian Kravagna tackled the problem of global curating and its readiness to represent non-European art within international exhibitions. Posing the fundamental question: 'How does one curate the art of other cultures, and who has a legitimate claim to curate it?' Kravagna points out that the 'one-way import' of non-Western cultures is part of a long tradition of colonial exhibitions. He concludes that 'Although the image of non-Western art has changed considerably in recent years, obstacles to the "globalization" of contemporary art remain.'[304]

Although Kravagna's point – that an exponential increase in non-Western art being included in numerous exhibitions has neatly avoided the fact that most of these have taken place in the West – is pertinent, it is important to take account of the impact of the ever-increasing number of peripheral cities seeking recognition in the art world by hosting biennials.[305] Places as culturally and historically diverse as Tirana, Dakar, Havana, Istanbul, Gwangju, São Paulo and Johannesburg have sought to boost, or reinvent, their global image, by exhibiting local artists alongside those operating within the more dominant cultural centres. It is here that the contemporary art circuit prevails

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[302] Bauer, Ute Meta. Interview with the author, London, 17/10/04, p. 9. See Appendix One: ME.

[303] Ibid. p. 12.

[304] Kravagna, Christian. 'Transcultural Viewpoints: Problems of representation in non-European art', *MIB – Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice*, Eds. Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler and Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2004), p. 93.

[305] Many of the exhibitions discussed in relation to colonialist and transcultural curating have taken place in Europe, such as 'Les Magicians de La Terre' (Paris), 'The Short Century: Independence and Liberal Movements in Africa' (curated by Okwui Enwezor for Museum Villa Stuck, Munich and Martin-Gropius Bau, Berlin, touring to the United States) and Documenta11 (Kassel).

over any economic, cultural or national borders.[306] As Hou Hanru suggested, such projects produce new localities in relation to the sphere of art; where each location is the product of specific, emergent contexts for 'the generation of social life, then cities can potentially become the most vital spaces for the production of localities, when they produce international or global artistic biennials.'[307] Biennials are an efficient means through which these localities can map out a place for themselves, at a global level, to become one point in the networked communication between other biennials. Kravagna also overlooks what Okwui Enwezor called the 'extraterritoriality'[308] of 'Documenta11', in which the displacement of the exhibition project, from its usual context in Kassel, was brought about via the production of discursive spaces through the organisation of five 'Platforms'.[309] These branched out from a series of what Enwezor called 'deterritorialisations', which not only intervened into the very historical location of Documenta in Kassel but also exemplified the mechanisms that make the space of contemporary art one of multiple ruptures.[310]

In his introduction to *Artforum*'s round-table discussion on art and globalisation in 2003, Tim Griffin highlighted that the particular cultural status and historical perception of the Venice Biennale and Documenta are endowed with a trans-national circuitry. In bringing together artists from a wide range of geo-cultural locations, such exhibitions have increased the level of visibility of non-Western artists, while fundamentally changing the discursive conditions around art and its public display.[311]

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[306] See Hou, Hanru. 'Towards a New Locality: Biennials and "Global Art"', Vanderlinden and Filipovic, op. cit. pp. 57-62.

[307] Ibid. p. 62.

[308] Okwui Enwezor explains this 'extraterritoriality' as: 'Firstly, by displacing its historical context of Kassel; secondly, by moving outside the domain of the gallery space to that of the discursive; and thirdly, by expanding the locus of the disciplinary models that constitute and define the project's intellectual and cultural interest.' Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box', op. cit. pp. 42-56.

[309] Ibid. p. 49. Enwezor describes the term 'Platform' as 'an open encyclopedia for the analysis of late modernity; a network of relationships; an open form for organising knowledge; a non-hierarchical model of representation; a compendium of voices, cultural, artistic, and knowledge circuits. The platforms were born out of discussions and debates that took place in Vienna, New Delhi, Berlin, St. Lucia, Lagos and Kassel (15 March, 2001-15 September, 2002). The five Platforms were 1) Democracy Unrealised; 2) Experiments with Truth: Transitional Justice and the Processes of Truth and Reconciliation; 3) Créolité and Creolization; 4) Under Siege: Four African Cities – Freetown, Johannesburg, Kinshasa, Lagos; 5) Exhibition 'Documenta11' and related catalogue. For a thorough discussion of the various platforms see Martin, Stewart. 'A New World Art? Documenting Documenta11', *Radical Philosophy*, No. 122, (November-December, 2003), pp. 7-19.

[310] Ibid. p. 40.

[311] 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition' op. cit. pp. 163-212.

Biennial culture has created a wider visibility for both exhibiting artists and curators, supported by the ongoing circulation of related discourse, which employs common frames of reference for those involved in the nomadic art world. Art magazines and journals assist in the maintenance of this discourse, equipped with the knowledge that many of those who read the reviews, critiques and published discussions will also have experienced the exhibition.

Exhibitions such as Documenta, the Venice Biennale and Manifesta are experienced by a large community of roving art spectators and professionals. Feedback loops are generated through the continual exchange of travelling spectatorship, whereby travel becomes one of the determining conditions for the production of art, its circulation and its primary experience. Biennials assist in the creation of a type of viewer who is a nomadic, global tourist. Like all tourists, s/he may experience other cultures as a means of defining his/her own, 'thinking itself unified, central, in control, universal'[312] while 'mastering otherness and profiting from it'[313] but art tourists are also susceptible to mistaking their experience of the global art world for experience of the world. The art world, regarded by James Meyer as having the 'small town ambience' of an otherwise global culture industry, enables the cult of idiosyncratic personality to develop, whereby the attachment to 'an artisanal mode of production' and its mediation resemble some kind of guild. For Meyer, the growth of art fairs and corporate galleries, of international biennials and multinational museums, points to 'a globalized reception and an increasingly mobile audience; the aficionado of art [who] must travel from Venice to Münster, from Berlin to New York in a constant motion in order to "keep up." And it is hardly surprising that this culture of itinerancy has influenced the terms of production itself.'[314]

Meyer also claimed that what he called the 'tyranny of the curator', in which the curator becomes a ubiquitous figure in art discourses, derives from the fact that it is curators who have the most generous travel budgets and are, therefore, better informed than artists or others in the industry as to what is happening within the field of art

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[312] MacCannell, Dean. *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999), p. xxi. For a detailed discussion on the figure of the tourist and the relationship between leisure, mobile spectatorship and the formation of the modernist mobile subject, see also Urry, John. *The Tourist Gaze: Leisure and Travel in Contemporary Society*, (London, Sage, 1990).

[313] Ibid. p. xxi.

[314] Meyer, James. 'Nomadic Figures of Travel in Contemporary Art', *Site-Specificity: The Ethnographic Turn*, Ed. Alex Coles (London, Black Dog Publishing, 2000), pp. 10-11.

production.[315] There is also an assumption that what happens on the biennial circuit, as well as at international art fairs, equates to global culture. This is compounded by the misconception that those who can travel to all these events have a more comprehensive world-view. We are at a moment when it is the curators, and not the scholars or critics, who are most engaged with contemporary practice and the public perception of it. In Meyer's words: 'It's the curators who travel the most, who see the greatest range of work, who have the broadest sense of practice; the curators whose activity (exhibition) is closest to practice and has the greatest impact on it... the vitality of critical debate appears to have shifted, at least for now, from discourse to curation.'[316] Certain curators have profited from this nomadic cultural industry but so have many artists, whose practice suits such conditions of production. According to Elena Filipovic, the proliferation of new biennials in the 1990s was seen by curators as a paradigmatic alternative to the museum when, in fact, they often mimicked them, rendered them equally privileged sites for cultural tourism and introduced a new category of art of 'bombastic proportions and hollow premises' that earned itself the name 'biennial art.'[317]

The recycling of a type of art that fulfilled the criteria for a spectacular international art event brought with it the myopic re-circulation of certain artists inextricably linked to art market interests.[318] Alongside biennial art, in the 1990s there was also the emergence of what Miwon Kwon called 'the itinerant artist', whose presence was brought about by 'shifts in the structural organisation of cultural production' and caused values like 'originality, authenticity, and singularity' to be 'evacuated from the artwork and attributed to the site.'[319] According to Kwon, there was a 'general valorisation of places as the locus of authentic experience',[320] which created a sense of there being a coherent

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[315] See Meyer's comments and general responses to questions in 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', op. cit. pp. 163-212.

[316] Ibid. p. 212.

[317] See Filipovic, Elena, op. cit. p. 66. Key examples of some of the most regularly-discussed biennial projects are 'Social Parade' by Jeremy Deller – an enormous public march of numerous social organisations in the streets of San Sebastián during 'Manifesta 5' in 2004; 'One Flew Over the Void' as a collaboration between Javier Tellez, the Baja California Mental Health Center in Mexico and human cannon ball David Smith, as part of 'Insite_05', which involed Smith being fired across the US-Mexican border, from Tijuana to a Border Field State Park in San Diego; Santiago Sierra's blocking of the Spanish Pavilion at the 50th Venice Biennale – by a brick wall rendering the pavilion inaccessible except to the Spanish public, and then only upon presentation of an official national identification card; or Sierra's action at the opening of the 49th Venice Biennale – when he bleached the hair of two hundred migrant workers from Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe, who could then be identified during the first weeks of the biennial by virtue of their distinctive hair styles.

[318] See Ibid. p. 66.

[319] Kwon, Miwon. op. cit. p. 52.

[320] Ibid. p. 52. Kwon provides the example of 'Places with a Past' (1991), curated by Mary Jane Jacob, which took the city of Charleston, South Carolina, as the backdrop, the main subject matter and the principal location for the commissioning of new works by artists conceived in response to the specific sites in and around Charleston.

relationship between place and identity. The placement of art in the context of a biennial is, therefore, complicated by the disjuncture between the location of production and its eventual display.[321] A typical experience is one in which the art (made elsewhere and brought to the site of display) or the artist (brought into the city from elsewhere to make work that responds to it) is partly removed, either from the original site of its production or from the place where the artist mainly works. In its new context, the work becomes identified through its cohesive relationship with other works in the curated, thematic exhibition and/or its place amongst other works selected from the international art world and the attendant global art market. Biennials enable a displaced viewership, representative of a fragmented idea of globalisation, while presenting an organised sense of the art world in free flow with the market.[322]

'Biennial art' as a niche market in itself was parodied by Jens Hoffmann and Maurizio Cattelan in 'Blown Away: Sixth International Caribbean Biennial' (1999), for which they invited a selection of artists – including Vanessa Beecroft, Olafur Eliasson, Mariko Mori, Elizabeth Peyton, Tobias Rehberger, Pipilotti Rist, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Chris Offili – who, in their view, had been the most ubiquitous on the international biennial circuit. The project was advertised, marketed and mediated through the standard art and media channels but, upon arrival at St. Kitts in the West Indies, the artists, including Cattelan, enjoyed a holiday together with no exhibition actually taking place. Afterwards, they produced a glossy, full-colour catalogue with holiday snaps, texts and statements representing the experience.[323] 'Blown Away: Sixth International Caribbean Biennial' could also be seen as a self-reflexive critique of the nomadic curator, increasingly responsible for seeking the new in far-off places. This has led to a level of predictability as one feature of the experience of biennials or, as Okwui Enwezor has put it, 'By now those of us who travel the great autobahns of the international circuit, where art and Otherness join symbiotically, know what to anticipate (perhaps too hastily) of exhibitions that limn the sharp contours of the multicultural image world.'[324]

The status of the large-scale biennial now goes beyond the event of the exhibition, with

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[321] Kwon, Miwon. op. cit. According to Kwon, 'site-specific' has been replaced by terms such as 'socially-engaged', 'site-oriented', 'site-responsive' and 'context-specific' as a way of rethinking how meaningful relationships can be established between the site of production and the reception of an artwork that considers its place within the social sphere as its main focus.

[322] See Verhagen, Marcus. op. cit. pp. 1-4.

[323] See Cattelan, Maurizio and Hoffmann, Jens. *Blown Away: 6th Caribbean Biennial*, (Lyon, Les Presses du Réel, 2001). See also Morton, Tom. 'Infinite Jester', *frieze*, 94, (October, 2005), pp. 150-155.

[324] Enwezor, Okwui. 'Inclusion/Exclusion: Art in the Age of Global Migration and Postcolonialism', *frieze*, 28 (March/April, 1996), pp. 89-90.

one of its primary functions being to operate as a survey or referencing tool for international contemporary art, its related discourse and the associated global art market. The biennial has become a ratifying device for the upper echelons of the contemporary art world, for artists and curators alike, which is characteristic of the trend towards establishing degrees of success within the art world. This is paralleled by annual 'best of' surveys of the previous year's activity, adhered to by magazines like *Artforum* and *frieze*.[325] As Eivind Furnesvik has pointed out, this 'hierarchical arrangement is further confirmed by the distribution of prizes – a practice common to most biennials. Similar to various recent books, such as *Cream, Fresh Cream, Art of Today,* and *Art at the Turn of the Millennium,* the biennial helps to form or corroborate the current "hot list".'[326]

2.5: The Late 1990s and the Move Towards Collective Curating – Three Approaches

Large-scale exhibitions – such as Enwezor's 'Trade Routes, History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennial' (1997) and 'Documenta11' (2002), Francesco Bonami's Venice Biennale (2003), Catherine David's 'Documenta X' (1997), Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun's Istanbul Biennial (2005) and successive Manifestas – have all, on one level, acknowledged the hierarchical power relations between selector and the selected. They have also recognised the limitations of presenting a single curatorial thesis through the structure of 1) the singly-authored exhibition, 2) the event of the exhibition moment as a hermetic curatorial entity and 3) the exhibition as a fixed, durational event.

Since 1989, the dominant discourses around international 'mega-exhibitions' have gradually moved away from singly-authored exhibition models, while enhancing the opportunities within a growing global exhibition market for a certain generation of curators.[327] Carlos Basualdo's observation, 'I think that my generation has become visible through shows like Documenta and [the] Venice Biennale...' identified an over-

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[325] See *Artforum*, Vol. XLV, No. 4, (December, 2006), which ran the cover 'Best of 2006', as selected by curators, artists and critics, and *frieze*, 104, (January/February, 2007), which began 2007 with a review of the 'Best in Art, Music, Film, Design, Books' from the preceding year.

[326] Furnesvik, Eivind. 'Phantom Pains: a Study of Momentum: Nordic Festival of Contemporary Art (1998 and 2000) and the Johannesburg Biennale (1995 and 1997)', *New Institutionalism, Verksted no.1*, Ed. Jonas Ekeberg (Oslo, Office for Contemporary Art Norway, 2003), p. 41.

[327] Curators such as Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Francesco Bonami, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche, Yuko Hasegawa, Hou Hanru, Vasif Kortun, Rosa Martinez, Ivo Mesquita, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Adrian Pedrosa, Apinan Poshyananda, and Barbara Vanderlinden are amongst the 1990s generation of curators who have curated a number of international biennials and are representative of what Thomas Boutoux called 'the new globalism of the art world'. Boutoux, Thomas. op cit. p. 215.

generalised phenomenon that has yet to be unravelled, '...so far, we have all been lumped together, these people who have emerged with globalisation. We have been relating more to that phenomenon and to the relation between art and spectacle.'[328] A brief glance at recent developments within large-scale international events reveals how this generation of curators has encouraged more collaborative forms of curating, which has become a mainstay of the biennial circuit. There are as many reasons for this shift, both pragmatically and ideologically, as there are different models. These have included working as part of an enforced team (Manifesta (since 1996)) or being selected to work on the overall concept by the Artistic Director (Okwui Enwezor in the case of 'Documenta11' and 'Trade Routes, History and Geography, 2nd Johannesburg Biennale') or being invited to curate a semi-autonomous component (e.g. within Francesco Bonami's 'Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer – the 50th Venice Biennale'). Co-curating has continued to evolve as the dominant working model for most perennial exhibitions, including the last versions of Istanbul (2005), Tirana (2006), São Paulo (2006) and Berlin (2006) Biennials. While not without its problems, such group work has demonstrated the advantages of pooling knowledge, resources, networks and opinions, as well as prefacing the exhibitions with an implied critique of the figure of the individual curator, which has gained in prominence since the late 1980s.

As Artistic Director of 'Documenta11', Enwezor chose to work with a team of curators[329] – a model he had introduced in 1997, during 'Trade Routes, History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennial' – as a means of bypassing the single 'exhibition-auteur' model, historically associated with such large-scale exhibitions.[330] This lineage of monolithic mega-exhibitions was established, innovated and instrumentalised by Harald Szeemann, beginning with 'Documenta 5' (1972) and continuing until his last Venice Biennale in 2001.[331] Where Jan Höet's 'Documenta 9' (1992) could be said to be the zenith of the über-curator/author, for Francesco Bonami, Harald Szeemann's decision to present Joseph Beuys' *The End of the 21st Century* as a

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[328] Basualdo, Carlos. Interview with the author, Venice, 10/06/05, p. 8. See Appendix One: BA.

[329] Enwezor invited Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Suzanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash, Octavio Zaya.

[330] For 'Trade Routes, History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennial' in 1997, Enwezor worked with Mahen Bonetti, Hou Hanru, Kellie Jones, Yu Yeon Kim, Geraldo Mosquera, Colin Richards and Octavio Zaya. See the catalogue, *Trade Routes, History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennial*, Eds. Okwui Enwezor et al. (Johannesburg, Greater Johannesburg Metropolitan Council, 1997).

[331] For a chronology of Szeemann's exhibitions see Müller, Hans-Joachim. *Harald Szeemann: Exhibition Maker*, op. cit. which employs Szeemann's exhibition history as the structure for the book.

key work in the 'The Plateau of Humanity: 49th Venice Biennale' (2001), was a symbolic and magical gesture with which to conclude the Golden Age of the Grand Curator – begun by Szeemann in the late 1960s. The 20th century of Grand Exhibitions – such as the Venice Biennale and Documenta – developed from a perception of the whole exhibition as an authored space narrated by a single curator.[332]

Enwezor argued against the 'bigness' of large-scale exhibitions and the claims that homogeneity destroys the differentiation proper to each individual practice. Considering it the curator's critical responsibility to the artists to make a legible statement by means of the exhibition,[333] he chose to implement a collective curatorial model, as a conscious shift away from the single-auteur paradigm.[334] He stated:

> Obviously, it is very difficult to avoid the position of being the auteur when you are the Artistic Director. You can bring in as many people as you want to sit at the table and you still have this big question mark. But I wanted to emphatically make it clear in the context of 'Documenta11' that there was no single author but a group of collaborators very much in tune with each other's strengths and weaknesses.[335]

Enwezor's method was to invite a group of curators to form part of a think-tank, to develop the concept and content of the exhibition under his direction, and to provide contextual texts. By contrast, the aim of the nomadic Manifesta Foundation is to bring together a group of high-profile curators (generally from divergent locations and perspectives, often unknown to each other) and ask them to work collaboratively on a single exhibition, in a selected European city, with an overarching geo-political agenda.[336] Although the Manifesta model appears to embrace a post-Szeemannian, multi-authored and transparent curatorial attitude, problems of authorship have arisen between the curators, themselves being curated into the structure of Manifesta with its Eurocentric global agenda. As 'Manifesta 4' co-curator Stéphanie Moisdon described her experience, 'Everything was organised in terms of geo-political strategies, and I think that this radical transparency doesn't exist at all.'[337] As an employee of Manifesta 'it's very tricky because you're supposed to be working freely as a curator, because it's

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[332] See Bonami, Francesco. 'I Have a Dream', op. cit. p. xix.

[333] See Enwezor's comments in 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', op. cit. pp. 163-212.

[334] Ibid. pp. 163-212.

[335] Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author, op. cit. p. 11. Appendix One: EN.

[336] For a survey of Manifesta see Vanderlinden and Filipovic, op. cit. and, for a critique of this book, see O'Neill, Paul. 'Manifesta', *Art Monthly*, No. 299, (September, 2006), p. 44.

[337] Moisdon, Stéphanie. Interview with the author, Paris, 18/04/05, p. 4. See Appendix One: MO.

like the sort of a kingdom of the curator, but it's never the case... it's not a collective practice. It's a game, a power, a force...'[338] She continues, 'You're much more territorialised when you're doing this kind of work, with people you didn't choose...you cannot take any risks because there is a problem of the responsibility. If you take a risk, you're not alone; then you cannot justify it, because there is not one voice but three, and the whole organisation behind.'[339]

Andrew Renton, co-curator of the first Manifesta, also had a compromising experience but his, more balanced, view acknowledges the negotiation aspect inherent to all biennials which, on some level, involve concessions to bring about their realisation. As Renton stated, 'it was much harder to work as a curator in collaborative mode, particularly when you've got this obligation to something bigger than you and I kind of think in terms of the human obligations of a large-scale project. I don't think of it as a kind of great turning point in terms of how I think about exhibitions because I think that biennials, by their very scale, involve so much in the way of compromise and pragmatism...'[340]

An even more fragmented, multifarious, but nonetheless semi-autonomous, method was employed by Francesco Bonami when he invited eleven curators to take responsibility for individual, but inter-connected, sections of 'Dreams and Conflicts: The Dictatorship of the Viewer – the 50th Venice Biennale' (2003). In total, eleven official exhibitions were staged as well as 'Links' and 'Interludes'. Bonami suggested that exhibitions, when carried out at a certain scale, are no longer exhibitions, but a plurality of visions.[341] He claimed that the curators' names at the entrance to each section of the Arsenale were not there in order to 'promote the curatorial practice but rather a way to define a "territory"', asserting that it was his main responsibility 'to ensure that each exhibition maintained its own legibility.'[342] Whether conscious or not, Bonami's symbolic departure from the Szeemannian century, and the monolithic curatorial paradigm, was nowhere more apparent than in his decision to mark the end of 'Dreams and Conflicts' with 'Utopia Station,' curated by Hans Ulrich Obrist, Molly Nesbitt and

[338] Ibid. p. 7. See Appendix One.

[339] Ibid. p. 8.

[340] Renton, Andrew. Interview with the author, London, 25/10/04, pp. 15. See Appendix One: RE.

[341] Francesco Bonami cited in 'Global Tendencies: Globalism and the Large-Scale Exhibition', op. cit. p. 157.

[342] Ibid. p. 157.

Rirkrit Tiravanija. This exhibition-within-an-exhibition presented a utopian vision, a Babelesque territory of transition, fragmentation and multiplicity, in which the sheer number of artists and the lack of any clearly-legible, autonomous artwork led to a confused sense of collectivism that overshadowed any potential singular narrative.[343]

Catherine David also extended the spatio-temporal nature of the exhibition format by organising '100 Days – 100 Guests' – i.e. one guest per day, to take part in discussions, debates and events – over the course of 'Documenta X'. In addition, the catalogue was used as a discursive space, which went beyond the conventional parameters of documenting the exhibition, to include texts by invited writers. At the turn of the new millennium, it examined four emblematic dates in contemporary history: 1945, 1967, 1978, 1989.[344] Similarly, Charles Esche – working with Istanbul-based curator Vasif Kortun to re-locate their '9th Istanbul Biennial' into the new city of Istanbul, away from its historical tourist site – published a biennial reader of critical writings, *Art, City and Politics in an Expanded World*, instead of the now-standard exhibition catalogue.[345] Along with Bonami, David and Enwezor, Esche and Kortun extended the reach of such curatorial projects by going beyond the parameters of the exhibition as a single narrative and by mobilising a field of public enquiry beyond the individual curatorial position, with discussions, lectures, publications, events, performances, and off-site projects being given added significance.

This relatively recent trend, for the 'extraterritorialisation' of the curatorial space, has already become a prerequisite within such exhibitions as they attempt to reflect on the global and local conditions under which they are produced, where different cultural practitioners from the world of art are interdependently integrated under the same exhibiting conditions. Conferences, interdisciplinary events and public discussions have become increasingly important elements of these projects. This expansion, beyond the site of the exhibition, now exemplifies the approach of biennial curators, encompassing more than the mere presentation of works of art. It posits the view that biennials are 'now understood as vehicles for the production of knowledge and intellectual debate[s]', which often have 'globalisation' as their main theme, while questioning the ideological

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[343] See http://www.e-flux.com/projects/utopia (accessed, 21/10/06). For a detailed history of the multiple manifestations and a genealogy of the orchestration of 'Utopia Station', see also Gillick, Liam. 'For a Functional Utopia? A Review of a Position', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit. pp. 123-136.

[344] See *Documenta X*, Ed. Catherine David (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 1999).

[345] See Esche and Kortun. op. cit. pp. 24-35.

underpinning of the event itself as a product of globalisation.[346]

With 'Documenta11', an emphasis was also placed upon the contemporary documentary film and discursive spaces were produced within the exhibition. Combined, these strategies shifted the emphasis away from the possible fetishisation of collected objects from exotic places, towards an interdependent relationship between art and global political/cultural/economic discourse.[347] According to Irit Rogoff, the building of critical discourse around global tendencies that began with the Platforms and discussions, meant that Enwezor's project managed to dislodge '...the optical regimes of identity=visibility, of those providing stereotypical characterizations of "elsewheres", of the easy translations through which the West reads everywhere outside of itself' and 'of the ways in which the art world continuously produces itself as a bounded territoriality. Documenta eroded some of those boundaries, eschewed the "reporting from over there" and made it abundantly clear, in radiant visual cacophony that it was always already "over here".'[348]

It is apparent in Rogoff's idea – of the collapse of the classic binary opposition of here and elsewhere, in the notion of already over here – that there is a common frame of reference between the West and non-West within postcolonial, geo-political discourse. She appears to argue for 'Documenta11' as a successful deterritorialisation of this discourse (both temporally and spatially) with neither the time nor the place of the exhibition spaces in the city of Kassel operating as the territorial node for these discussions. By making provision for five discursive Platforms and using these domains as the foundation of 'Documenta11', Enwezor certainly had ambitions to transcend any fixed notion of location. He later stated that he was very interested in utilising 'the postcolonial dimension of Documenta11, and [in] the most expansive way that one could understand it. The postcolonial is not simply the elsewhere, over there, and [to consider that] over here means something else, but to see the entire global entanglement as postcolonial in its shape.'[349]

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[346] See Filipovic, Elena. op. cit. p. 66.

[347] See Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box', op. cit.

[348] Rogoff, Irit. 'Of Fear, Of Contact and Of Entanglement', *Strangers to Ourselves,* Eds. Judith Stewart et al. (Hastings, Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, 2004), p. 52.

[349] Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author, op. cit. p. 7. See Appendix One: EN.

'Documenta11' presented practice and discourse as dialectically entwined, with thesis, antithesis and synthesis overlapping. The thesis was presented as that of a global art world, embodied in shifting borders and abstractions of language, space and time. How these abstractions are actually experienced in social, political and cultural life is the antithesis, with the synthesis being how artists represent the thesis and antithesis through the production of art. For Enwezor and his six invited curators, Documenta, as an historical art institution and a manufactured postcolonial space, became a utopian place for intersecting critical discourses that transcended territorialisation – a meeting place in and of itself with no prescribed forms of closure. It became a specific (symbolic and actual) space for displacement, dislocation and fragmentation. Curator Ute Meta Bauer called this a temporarily 'adopted country', for intellectual diasporas from diverse origins and disciplines, where art functioned as 'a space of refuge – an in-between space of transition and of diasporic passage.'[350] Bauer called this the 'third space', where 'the inevitable discrepancies and irritations that come with it are not only retained as a structure but moreover are inserted as catalysts for new forms of understanding that can be developed – perhaps as productive misunderstandings, perhaps in fruitful confrontation of different methods, ways of thinking, and languages.'[351]

But do all roads not lead to Kassel? Although the Platform discussions were subsequently disseminated in the form of published texts after the events, the final Platform (the exhibition) still took place in Kassel, with artists imported into a physical and discursive space of coexistence. It was still Documenta, with its cultural relevance within the Western art historical canon and the contemporary global art market. Is the periphery absorbed by the centre, as Charles Esche suggested, by being validated by an established Western institution such as Documenta?

On a primary level, both Rogoff's point and Enwezor's intentions are undone by the inescapability of the conditions of Documenta itself and the fact that the medium of the exhibition overrides all else as the *a priori* legitimising cultural form under these conditions.[352] On a secondary level, the reverse of both Rogoff and Enwezor's rationales are also true. The discursive and less-formalised nature of the

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[350] See Bauer, Ute Meta. 'The Space of Documenta11: Documenta11 as a Zone of Activity', *Documenta 11_ Platform 5: The Catalogue*. op. cit. pp. 103-107.

[351] Ibid. p. 103.

[352] I am not suggesting here that Enwezor and Rogoff are in complete accordance with each other, and I do not wish for their positions to be misread as a unified one, but there are distinct similiarities. I am specifically referring to their apparently mutual understanding of 'place' as a contested site of postcolonial discourse.

extraterritorialised Platforms reinforced the idea that talking could happen elsewhere, while the more concrete, real and formalised experience of art would happen over here – to use Rogoff's term – at the art historical site of exhibition that is Kassel. On the third and final level, perhaps the legacy of Enwezor's contribution was the consciousness-raising move which momentarily shifted the emphasis away from the exhibition, both symbolically and in actuality.[353] By endeavouring to organise significant gatherings beyond Kassel under the umbrella of Documenta, an alternative model was proposed along with a clearly-articulated curatorial position, which transcended the fixity of the exhibition form as the primary site of art and its related discourse. The implicit questions underlying 'Documenta11' and its shifting discursive territories remain: Is Kassel still the right site for Documenta? Is Documenta, as an institution, the right place for a new geopolitical discourse around globalised art and culture? Is Documenta the right place for the legitimisation of this discourse within contemporary art and curatorial practice? Likewise, such questions could equally be asked of established and emerging biennials alike.

For Ute Meta Bauer, such questions are addressed by considering the relevance of the art historical canon, represented by Documenta, as an institution that consolidates art history.[354] This was most evident in the significance placed by Enwezor on the Platforms and the prevalence of lengthy time-based work, which made it impossible to view the whole exhibition in a single visit. Kassel, as the historical site of Documenta, and Documenta as a major legitimising force within art history, brought a predominantly non-Westernised geopolitical discourse to Kassel, initially by asking how and from where a new canon could be read. 'Documenta11' entailed re-configuring the canon through the kinds of practice that were selected. As Enwezor stated:

> [Documenta11] was also about where the canon was going to be read from... for us the question was: how do we read the map of contemporary art from Kassel? and that meant that Kassel had to be connected to these vectors. That is how the Platforms emerged...We wanted to look at the notion of the canon. We wanted to look at different ways of working.[355]

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[353] At the time of writing, 'documenta 12' Artistic Director, Roger M. Buerghel, has invited curator Georg Schöllhammer to reflect upon certain key questions before the opening of the exhibition at Kassel (on 16 June, 2007). Over eighty print and on-line periodicals from around the world have been invited to consider 'documenta 12's three leitmotifs – Is modernity our antiquity? What is bare life? What is to be done? The first 'documenta 12' Magazine is assembled to summarise these debates in a 'journal of journals' published as *Documenta 12 Magazine No 1, 2007 Modernity?* Ed. Schöllhammer, Georg (Cologne, Taschen GmbH, 2007), with issues 2 and 3 to follow in the spring and summer of 2007. Each issue will offer a perspective – elaborated jointly by more than 80 editors – on one of the core themes of 'documenta 12'. See www.documenta.12.de/magazine.htm (assessed 10/01/07).

[354] See Bauer, Ute Meta. Interview with the author, London, 17/10/04, especially pp. 16-17. See Appendix One: ME.

[355] Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author, op. cit. p. 12. See Appendix One: EN.

This realignment, of the point from which history and art can be read, remains one of the outstanding issues of biennial projects since 1989. As Carlos Basualdo has said, 'The ideological effects of these types of exhibition strategies are well known: the consolidation of an artistic canon and therefore the staging of a series of mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion that assures its permanence.'[356] All biennials are, indeed, different in origin and aspiration, but what I have sought to outline are the apparently common threads of discussion within this aspect of the curatorial field since 1989.[357] Biennials have effected a realignment of the art world, allowing a view of the world that is more trans-cultural, with curators establishing a wider interface between art and audiences, local and global, national and international, with inclusiveness as one of their main motivations.

One of the consequences of the proliferation and consolidation of biennials is that they have configured a prominent role for the practice of curating at the level of the global market. Since 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' failed in its attempt to create a less-Westernised view of the global art world from the perspective of the curator, the biennial has continued to mutate and transform the way in which we experience contemporary art beyond the established centres of artistic production. Biennials emerging in the 1990s helped to reposition the curatorial role as one involving the organisation of a complex network of global exchange. Many curators have embraced cultural pluralism as a new standard of representation which has, in turn, facilitated a higher degree of visibility for a new generation of artists and curators working on the biennial circuit of exhibitions. Curators have utilised the biennial exhibition model as a vehicle for both validating and contesting what constitutes the international art world, to explicate artistic practices that have been traditionally subordinated, submerged or lacking in visibility. Biennial curators have begun to acknowledge the failure of the singly-authored model of exhibition-making, particularly when such exhibitions demand a greater level of access to a wider network of artistic and cultural practices. In order to sustain an inclusive model of exhibition, the merits of group work and a pooling of

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[356] Basualdo, Carlos. 'The Encyclopedia of Babel', *Documenta11_Platform 5: The Catalogue*. op. cit. p. 60.

[357] A point that the director of the 2007 Venice Biennale, Robert Storr, was keen to make in his pre-Venice lecture (at The Royal College of Art and Design, London, February 2006) on biennials and their historical relationship with 19th Century Salons. This was a less formal version of the paper Storr gave at the symposium 'Where Art Worlds Meet: Multiple Modernities and the Global Salon', which Storr organised in Venice, December 2005. See the review of the Venice Biennale symposium: Jones, Caroline A. 'Troubled Waters', *Artforum*, XLIV, No. 6, (February, 2006), pp. 91-92

knowledge and resources have manifested themselves in more collective models of curating.

What began as a critique, of both Western Modernism and the colonial approach to other contemporary cultures, has resulted in a rethinking of how, where and which art is seen in the context of international exhibitions. Biennials and large-scale, temporary, recurring exhibitions have succeeded, for Okwui Enwezor, in providing what he claimed as models of resistance to the hegemonic power of Western art history, museums and established art institutions by bringing a greater interaction with new spaces for critical reflection, alongside the growth of more heterogenous, and trans-cultural audiences in a complex network of global knowledge. In doing so, he has also enabled a greater diversity of artistic positions, through which artists and curators no longer rely on established museums and institutions.[358] What Enwezor called 'deterritorialisation' has happened during a period in which the evolution of an international network for 'an increasingly mobile and well-connected elite of professionals'[359] paralleled the rise of the global contemporary art world, with its increasingly dense exhibitions market.[360] Biennials and large-scale exhibitions have also embraced globalism as an easily adoptable model for reconfiguring the art world along with the role of the curator,[361] while certain mega-exhibitions have been articulated, by their curators and critics alike, as history-making institutions in and of themselves.

[358] See Enwezor, Okwui. 'The Black Box.' Ibid. p. 53.

[359] Boutoux, Thomas. op. cit. p. 212.

[360] Ibid. p. 212.

[361] Enwezor, Okwui. 'Mega-Exhibitions and the Antimonies of a Transnational Global Form', in *MJ – Manifesta Journal 2*, op. cit. p. 31.

Chapter Three

Curating as a Medium:

The Convergence of Art and Curatorial Practice Since the 1990s

Introduction

As outlined in Chapter One, the late 1960s witnessed a shift away from the perception of curating as a caring, meditative, administrative activity towards one of curating as a creative activity more akin to a form of artistic practice. While many metaphors have fleetingly been applied to the role of the curator throughout this period of transformation, the 'curator as artist' analogy remains a recurring theme. Having begun this dissertation with a consideration of the emergence of this concept in the late 1960s – linked to the practice of curators such as Lucy Lippard, Seth Siegelaub and Harald Szeemann – this final chapter will demonstrate how the notion of curator-as-artist still pervades curatorial discussions.

As an activity, curating is implicated in what Pierre Bourdieu called the cultural 'production of the value of the artist and of art.'[362] With this in mind, much of this chapter responds to questions of value, in relation to artists as autonomous producers and the degree to which exhibitions – and those responsible for them – affect or encompass the production (and/or co-production) of art. By way of introduction to an issue that permeates my research, this could easily have formed the first chapter of this dissertation; instead it becomes part of a continuum, a bookend riddled with conflict and contestation, demonstrating how the dissolution of the categories of artist and curator, begun in the 1960s, has, since the 1990s, resulted in the convergence of artistic and curatorial practice.

Centred on concepts of agency, production and authorship – linked to artistic and curatorial practices and the 'dissolution of categories instead of the exchange of roles'[363] between curator and artist – I aim to demonstrate how artists have adopted the practice of curating as a medium of production. As an artist who primarily employs curating as a medium for exhibition production, this chapter also attempts to situate my own practice

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[362] See Bourdieu, Pierre. *The Field of Cultural Production*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993), p. 261.

[363] Hoffmann, Justin. 'God is a Curator', *MIB – Men in Black: Handbook of Curatorial Practice*, Eds. Christoph Tannert, Ute Tischler and Künstlerhaus Bethanien (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2004), p. 108.

in relation to these discussions. As such, it provides the historical and contemporary backdrop for curatorial projects I have realised alongside this research, which are described in Part Two.

3.1: The Group Exhibition as a Medium of Communication

According to Bruce W. Ferguson, exhibitions (in whatever form) are always rhetorical, ideological media.[364] As part of the consciousness industry, he asserts, they are complex tools of persuasion whose strategies aim to prescribe a set of values and social relations for their audiences.[365] As strategic systems of representation, exhibitions are organised in order to best exploit their component parts:

> From its architecture which is always political, to its wall colorings which are always psychologically meaningful, to its labels which are always didactic...to its artistic exclusions which are always powerfully ideological and structural in their limited admissions, to its lighting which always dramatizes...to its security systems which are always a form of social collateral...to its curatorial premises, which are always professionally dogmatic, to its brochures and catalogues and videos which are always literary-specific and pedagogically directional, to its aesthetics which are always historically specific.[366]

For Ferguson, it is in relation to the 'site of presentation, rather than to [an] individual artwork's moments of production' that exhibitions generate such hierarchical structures, to produce both general and specific forms of communication.[367] As texts which make their private intentions public, exhibitions form part of the political economy of cultural production; in particular, the temporary art exhibition has become the principal medium in the distribution and reception of art and is, therefore, 'the principal agency in the debates and criticism around any aspect of the visual arts.'[368]

As already outlined in Chapters One and Two, the group exhibition has, since the late 1980s, been the dominant form through which key developments in curatorial practice have taken place, to become a global phenomenon in the context of perennial, large-

[364] See Ferguson, Bruce W. 'Exhibition Rhetorics', *Thinking About Exhibitions*, Eds. Reesa Greenberg, Bruce Ferguson and Sandy Nairne (London and New York, Routledge, 1996), p. 178.

[365] Ibid. p. 178.

[366] Ibid. p. 178.

[367] Ibid. p. 178.

[368] Ibid. p. 179.

scale exhibitions. I would argue that the emergence and consolidation of the notion of the group exhibition as an authored space, has constituted both the principal curatorial form and the primary medium through which contemporary art and curatorial discourse have been determined. As a particular method of determining material practices, the exhibition can also be understood as a medium, in the sense that Raymond Williams referred to it, 'as something with its own specific and *determining* properties (in one version taking priority over anything actually said or written or shown), [which] has in practice been compatible with a social sense of media in which practices and institutions are seen as agencies of mediation in and of themselves.[369]

In the introduction to their seminal anthology *Thinking About Exhibitions*, published in 1996, Bruce W. Ferguson, Reesa Greenberg and Sandy Nairne stated 'Exhibitions have become *the* medium through which most art becomes known.'[370] By stressing the definitive article preceding the word 'medium', Ferguson, Greenberg and Nairne emphasise how the exhibition, as a specific cultural form, is the foremost intermediary through which ideas and knowledge around art are now produced and disseminated. In his individual essay for this publication, Ferguson switches the emphasis from the definitive article to the noun when he writes:

> Exhibitions can be understood then as the *medium* of contemporary art in the sense of being its main agency of communication – the body and voice from which an authoritative character emerges. Exhibitions are the central speaking subjects in the standard stories about art which institutions and curators often tell to themselves and to us.[371]

Exhibitions have, therefore, become the main presentation medium of art, in the sense of being the vehicle through which experience and knowledge of art is established and maintained. For Ferguson, at least, there is a correlation between the exhibition as a momentary event, which facilitates discourse on artistic practice, and the exhibition as the dominant public cultural formation around which these discussions are orientated. It is worth adding that Ferguson's emphasis on the exhibition, as the primary medium through which contemporary art is communicated, reinforces the primacy of temporarily-staged exhibitions, as transitory moments of discursive exchange between

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[369] Williams, Raymond. *Keywords*, (London, Fontana Press, 1983), p. 204. Italics in original.

[370] Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 2.

[371] Ferguson. op. cit. p. 176.

artists, curators, critics and audiences. They are intermediary channels of communication, functioning as mediating events through which art discourses are produced and transformed. As I have already argued, recent curatorial discourses have focused primarily on the ritual-experiential space of the exhibition as an event, rather than on the objects comprising it, as a means of configuring a relationship for viewers to the exhibition as a whole.[372] Ferguson suggests that exhibitions of a temporary nature are political tools for maintaining the status quo; they are modern ritual settings that reinforce identities (artistic, avant-garde, gender, racial, subcultural, regional, national, international, global etc.) and need to be understood as institutional utterances within a larger culture industry.[373]

All curators, artists and critics participate in the production of cultural experiences, with exhibitions forming intrinsic and vital parts of what Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer termed the 'culture industries' – associated with entertainment, popular media and the mediation of mass culture.[374] What Adorno and Horkheimer alleged, in their 1940s critique of the culture industry, was that the process of standardisation within popularised mass entertainment was exerted at the expense of both art and individualism.[375] As they outlined, mass culture is often explained in technological terms, by those involved in its production. Those 'interested parties'[376] so often claim that, because 'millions participate in it and that certain reproduction processes are necessary', high levels of mediation must be maintained so that access can be increased to service innumerable places of consumption.[377]

In this context, as a technological term that is often linked to mass communication, 'medium' refers both to the technological devices used in the transfer of information to larger audiences – such as newspapers, radio and television – and to the coercive ideological apparatuses linked to power and the rationale of domination.[378] Adorno later

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[372] See also, Duncan, Carol. *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (Oxon and New York, Routledge, 1995).

[373] Ibid. p. 179.

[374] Adorno, Theodor W. and Horkheimer, Max. 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', *Dialectics of Enlightenment*, (London and New York, Verso Classics, 1997), trans. John Cummings, pp. 120-167 [first published as *Dialektik der Aufklarung* in 1944; first English translation in 1972]. .

[375] See Ibid. p. 121.

[376] See Ibid. p. 121.

[377] See Ibid. p. 121.

[378] Ibid. p. 121.

wrote at length about the homogenisation of culture, through mass media and increased bureaucratisation, 'in the age of integral organization';[379] with 'the twisted feeling of irreconcilability',[380] he established a dialectic between culture and administration. The latter, which is subordinate and institutional, highlighted how 'every other form of organisation' – such as 'traditionalist organisation' or 'non-mechanical production' – is overpowered by 'the technical superiority of the organisational type of administration' as a neutralising bureaucratic force for culture, restricting art's potentiality as an autonomous form of progressive cultural production.[381]

Adorno's critique of any organisation of cultural consumption which flattened out the freedom to choose, also described a notable schism between, on the one side, culture as individual creativity and, on the other, organisation as a counter-productive force working against this individuality. Those most responsible for culture and its organisation, the artist and the curator, are put forward as oppositional agencies, with different concepts of technique being applied to each. One such technique is concerned with the *internal* organisation of the work of art, as enacted by the artist, while the technique of the culture industry is concerned with *external* organisation, through different modes of distribution, reproduction and/or administration.[382] While Adorno was not arguing specifically for, or against, the role of the organiser, mediator or curator of exhibitions, his argument – that organisation, administration and mediation are techniques of the culture industry, part of the external organisation of culture operating at the expense of art's internal creative autonomy – reinforced the division between the artist, on the one hand, and the organiser, or mediator, on the other.[383]

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[379] Adorno, Theodor W. *The Culture Industry*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1991 [first published in 1972]), op. cit. p. 108.

[380] Ibid. p. 113.

[381] Ibid. p. 109. See also pp. 107-131.

[382] Ibid. p. 101.

[383] Ibid. p. 107. See also Adorno's chapter 'Culture and Administration', *The Culture Industry*, op. cit. pp. 107-131.

3.2: Curating Against Artistic Autonomy

For John Miller, the spectre of the curator-as-artist, operating at the expense of artistic autonomy, became a point of discussion in relation to large-scale exhibitions at the time of Jan Höet's 'Documenta 9' in 1992. Höet put himself forward as a 'curatorial artist', using a diverse range of artworks as the raw material, or 'energy',[384] for his exhibition, with the exhibition itself 'intended to act as a drive-belt' for these energies.[385]Advocating a role for the curator as the leading creative agency in exhibition-making, he described an instinctive process of bringing art together, to make up a unified exhibition, with 'a specific aim in view; [that the exhibition] is carried along by one controlling idea.'[386] In its form and content, the exhibition was intended to show 'where the selection process must start [and] how successive decisions affect each other and have the power to create an inner structure.'[387] In the final paragraph of his introduction to the catalogue, Höet writes, 'This exhibition is my text; every work that is contributed is a postulate; and the discourse unfolds as one walks through the spaces. It shows how one can think in, and with, reality and it shows how one does not necessarily need a blank piece of paper in order to think. It shows art.'[388] Höet proposed the exhibition as a text, the curator as an author and art as selected components within an overall structure which, rather than being described, could only be perceived by the audience in the course of 'the direct confrontation with the real experience'[389] of his exhibition.

What Miller identified here as a key moment of confrontation, between curatorial and artistic positions in the context of group exhibitions, may be traced back even further to the late 1960s (as outlined in Chapter One). The comparison of two statements made in the early 1970s – one by the artist Daniel Buren and the other by curator Kynaston McShine – again highlights this antagonism. When Daniel Buren claimed, in 1972, that 'More and more, the subject of an exhibition tends not to be the display of artworks, but

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[384] See Höet, Jan. 'An Introduction', *Documenta 9*, Eds. Roland Nachtigäller and Nicola von Velsen (Stuttgart, Cantz, 1992), p. 19.

[385] See Miller, John. 'Arbeit Macht Spass?' *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated by an Artist*, Ed. Jens Hoffmann (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2004), p. 59.

[386] Höet, Jan. op. cit. p. 20.

[387] Ibid. p. 20.

[388] Ibid. p. 21.

[389] Ibid. p. 20.

the exhibition of the exhibition as a work of art,'[390] he was referring specifically to the work of Harald Szeemann and his controversial 'Documenta 5'. By suggesting that artworks served as mere fragments making up a composite exhibition in the name of the curator, he was also referring to the general emergence of the idea of the exhibition organiser as an author. This curator-as-author position had already been accurately described in Kynaston McShine's catalogue essay for the exhibition, 'Information', which he curated at MoMA in 1970, when he wrote that 'I have purposefully made this text short and very general. *Information* will allow for a more careful and thorough analysis of all the aesthetic and social implications of the work. My essay is really in the galleries and in the whole of this volume.'[391]

So, how much has really changed in relation to this perception of the curator acting as a prevalent force behind exhibitions at the expense of artistic autonomy? Writing in 2004, Buren elaborated on his earlier assertion with little variation:

> ...[artworks are] particular details in the service of the work in question, the exhibition of our organiser-author. At the same time – and this is where the problem has become pointed enough to create the crisis in which we find ourselves – the 'fragments' and other 'details' exhibited are, by definition and in most cases, completely and entirely foreign to the principal work in which they are participating, that is, the exhibition in question.[392]

Buren's distaste for group exhibitions acquiring the status of quasi-artworks – in which the curator transforms the work of each artist into a useful fragment in his or her own production of an exhibition-as-art – is still palpable as a residual conception of the curatorial hand at work.[393] The great irony of Buren's later statement is that it was published in response to the assertion that the 'Next Documenta Should be Curated by an Artist' made by curator Jens Hoffmann as a part of his own curatorial project/exhibition/publication. By inviting Buren and thirty other artists to respond, Hoffmann's intention was to open up discussion around the effectiveness of an artist-led curatorial model as a way of questioning the distinction between artistic and curatorial practices.

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[390] Buren, Daniel. 'Exhibition of an Exhibition' (1972) cited in 'Where are the Artists?', Buren's contribution to Hoffman, Jens. op. cit. p. 26.

[391] McShine, Kynaston L. 'Introduction', *Information*, (New York, Museum of Modern Art, 1970), p. 141.

[392] Buren. 'Where are the Artists?' op. cit. p. 30.

[393] Ibid. p. 30.

One of the critical responses to Hoffmann's initiative, by Mark Peterson, was that it 'ultimately uses a similar curatorial strategy as the one he is criticising, namely to invite artists to illustrate his thesis [and] this project is in fact nothing else than another exhibition.'[394] Peterson goes on to argue that Hoffmann's attempt to involve artists – in questioning not only his own curatorial practice but also the various mechanisms and dynamics of his medium, his profession and how exhibitions gain form – deflects attention away from Hoffmann's own curatorial trap, namely selecting and collating a number of artistic positions within a single curatorial framework. This may, in part, be true but Peterson's placement of the curator and artist in opposition to one another is, following Adorno's rationale, now a familiar stance within curatorial debates. It remains central to the question of what constitutes the medium of curating and the extent to which curating is a mode of subjective authorship and a medium of production in its own right.

As Hans-Dieter Huber acknowledged, curating has been transformed into 'something like a signature, a specific style, a specific image, a name that can be associated with specific curators and their respective work. What once characterized the work of an artist, namely his style, his signature, and his name, is now true of the work of the curator.'[395] As curator Nicolas Bourriaud asserts, the core issue in thinking about the value of individual curatorial practices is one of style and no longer a question as to 'whether or not you are an author as a curator, but which kind of author you are.'[396] Hoffmann has argued that the emergence of the author-curator draws parallels with the author-director, linked to film-making and '*auteur* theory' of the 1950s, in which an understanding of individual practice included 'thematic consistency of production', 'a strong creative sensibility in regard' to interpretation and 'an apparent artistic development' over time.[397] This is similar to how Hoffmann has described his signature style as using 'the idea of the world as a stage: something that is fluid and temporary,

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[394] Ibid. p. 80. This comment by Mark Peterson was originally made as part of an Open Forum that took place on www.e-flux.com.

[395] Huber, Hans-Dieter. 'Artists as Curators – Curators as Artists?' Tannert and Tischler, op. cit. p. 126.

[396] See Bourriaud, Nicolas. Interview with the author, Paris, 27/01/04, p. 9. See Appendix One: BO.

[397] See Hoffmann, Jens. 'A Certain Tendency of Curating', *Curating Subjects*, Ed. Paul O'Neill (London and Amsterdam, Open Editions and De Appel, 2007), pp. 137-142. Hoffmann's essay takes its title from François Truffaut's landmark text, first published in 1954, which introduced the theory of the *auteur* in cinema at a time when film directors sought to be perceived at the same level as literary authors. See Truffaut, François. 'A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema', *Movies and Methods*, Ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1976).

constantly changing, evolving, unpredictable and in continuous progress. I am interested in a concept of curating as directing, the exhibition as a play and the play as an exhibition. It is the idea of the curator having a role in the set-up of an exhibition that is similar to the one of a director in the set-up of a theatre play.'[398]

3.3: Curating as Cultural Production

The diversity of curating styles and curatorial practices that have emerged since the 1990s is demonstrated by Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter's ongoing project, 'Curating Degree Zero Archive' (CDZA), which began in 1998.[399] Drabble describes the project as trying 'to look at more liminal positions' within the curatorial field, at curators 'who had started their life as artists and were developing their artistic practice in a curatorial direction, others who had produced material which involved selection or reclamation of particular historical positions but were presenting it as art production in one form or another' and those curators 'who were working regularly with institutions but approaching this with a freelance logic, dropping into institutions and attempting to implement quite critical projects, then jumping back out again.'[400] What the sheer volume of material in the archive most overtly represents is how the parameters defining

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[398] See Hoffmann, Jens. Interview with the author, London, 11/08/04, p. 3. See Appendix One: HO.

[399] For a full list of contributors to the project, its touring history, a detailed bibliography and a statement by the curators, see www.curatingdegreezero.org (accessed 01/01/07).

[400] See Drabble, Barnaby. Interview with the author, London, 28/04/05, p. 1. See Appendix One: DR. The 'CDZA' is partly a resource, partly a series of exhibition structures or designs containing the archive, as well as an expanding research project as curatorial practice. The archival material ranges from exhibition catalogues, interviews, press material, articles, videos, CDs, images, websites and textual material relating to over a hundred participants selected by curators Dorothee Richter and Barnaby Drabble. The project is available as a website, but also tours as an archive. A wide range of practices is represented, but common to most is a critical engagement with the potentialities of curating as a space for exploration beyond the parameters of the institutionalised exhibition structure, without ever rejecting the exhibition itself as another possible space for this exploration. As the archive tours, it also gathers new material from the particular networks of the host venues. Most of the curators in the archive favour working together with artists and other practitioners, rather than with discrete objects or existing artworks. As part of an ongoing research project dedicated to collating and archiving the work of freelance or non-institutional curators, artist-curators, new-media curators and collaborative curatorial groups, the archive is an essential resource to any interested researcher within the field. It also has a useful website and online bibliography of literature catalogued as part of the archive. In general, the make-up of the archive articulates curating as a mutating, differential, discursive, multifarious and unfixed individual discipline. Each time the archive is displayed, Drabble and Richter invite an artist, artists' collective or curator to reinterpret the archive and supply a designed support structure for display of the material. For example, when the exhibition took place at Imperial College, London, in 2005, Artlab (artists Charlotte Cullinan and Jeanine Richards) recycled, remade, and re-used existing elements from their signature brown and white sculptures and produced an environment in which to display the archive. The artists supplied seating, tables and towering display units made from piled-up circular cable reels that were as dominant as the enormous amount of files, archive boxes and publications contained within their display structures. Both structure and displayed materials worked in tandem with each other and, on the whole, the CDZA project appears to question what is really being exhibited. The main focus of the project appears to be fourfold: 1) the exhibition as an archive made accessible for interested visitors; 2) the exhibition as a representation of the diversity of contemporary curatorial practices; 3) the exhibition as a place for the production of an artwork – as the structure for supporting and displaying the material and 4) the exhibition as a combination of these elements as a curatorial initiative.

curatorial practice have expanded since the 1990s, and how the traditional categories of artist and curator have been conflated within many divergent forms of creative practice.

The move towards an understanding of the implicit role of contemporary curating as an active mode of cultural production was foretold when Pierre Bourdieu described how many different agencies were at work in the production of the meanings and values of art and the artist:

> [T]he 'subject' of the production of the art-work – of its value but also of its meaning – is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather the entire set of agents engaged in the field. Among these are the producers of works, classified as artists (great or minor, famous or unknown), critics of all persuasions (who are themselves established in the field), collectors, middlemen, curators, etc., in short, all those who have ties with art, who live for art and, to varying degrees, from it, and who confront each other in struggles where the imposition of not only a world view but also a vision of the art world is at stake, and who through these struggles, participate in the production of the value of the artist and of art.[401]

Bourdieu's articulation of the field of cultural production, as a 'shared language' amongst those involved in a specific field, demonstrated that apparent forms of communication were actively produced and maintained from within the social and cultural field of art by all those who have an investment in it. [402] Bourdieu established that any perception of the art world must go beyond an understanding of art as something to be appreciated solely in terms of aesthetics, to include concepts of value, classification and characterisation within the socio-cultural sphere.[403] Further, artists and curators are co-operative producers of culture, regardless of what it is that distinguishes their mode of agency, and all cultural producers relate to each other through a common field of reference and shared vocabulary, used to articulate and to 'structure the expression and the experience of the work of art.'[404]

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[401] Bourdieu, Pierre op. cit. p. 261.

[402] Ibid. p. 261.

[403] Ibid. pp. 261-62.

[404] Ibid. p. 261-62.

3.4: Exhibition Curating as a Medium of Self-Presentation

Beatrice von Bismarck proposed that one of the byproducts of the ubiquity of the curator within the ever-expanding cultural entertainment industry is that 'Professionalisation and differentiation within the art world have turned "curating" into a hierarchically structured job description covering a wide range of activities.'[405] Von Bismarck goes on to claim that the advent of so-called independent curating is the structural consequence of an expanding art market, in which 'internationally networked service providers' offer their skills to a diverse exhibition market, often ending up presenting their curatorial concept as artistic product.[406] Curating is now primarily understood as a presentation medium, as an activity that is distinct from a limited job title:

> Of the tasks originally associated with the fixed institutional post, curating takes only that of presentation. With the aim of creating an audience for artistic and cultural materials and techniques, of making them visible, the exhibition becomes the key presentation medium. In contrast to the curator's other duties, curating itself frees the curator from the invisibility of the job, giving him/her an otherwise uncommon degree of freedom within the museum institution and a prestige not unlike that enjoyed by artists.[407]

As Nathalie Heinich and Michael Pollak argue, the contemporary art museum now tends to place its emphasis on the research and mediation of temporary exhibitions rather than focusing on its collection. This privileging of one-off, short-term exhibitions within museums indicates a growing specialisation – through surveys, historical overviews, geographically- or nationally-specific and thematic exhibitions – articulated from the perspective of the curator(s).[408] Within such a subject-centred exhibition programme, 'The exhibition curator's function authorizes a measure of fame which eludes other colleagues to the extent that an exhibition assumes the guise of cultural event whose positions and merits are publicly discussed by a cultivated audience.'[409] Within this framework, the curator is recognised as the agent responsible for the exhibition as an object of study, and no longer perceived as merely part of a chain of administrative co-

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[405] Von Bismarck, Beatrice. 'Curating', Tannert and Tischler, op. cit. p. 99.

[406] Ibid. p. 99.

[407] Ibid. p. 99.

[408] Heinich, Nathalie and Pollak, Michael. 'From Museum Curator to Exhibition Auteur: Inventing a Singular Position', Greenberg et al. op. cit. p. 237.

[409] Ibid. p. 237.

operation within a public institution. Curators are not only involved in the selection, consigning and installation of artworks, but also in the expanded administrative role of determining a conceptual framework, working with collaborators from other specialist fields and assuming a formal position in terms of a curatorial presentation linked to authorship, where 'the press deals with the exhibition not so much as a transparent medium produced by an institution but as the work of an individual [curator].'[410]

Dorothee Richter suggests that the presentation of an exhibition is now a form of self-presentation, a courting of the gaze in which an exhibition's meaning is derived from the relationship between artistic positions. This is substantiated by the related idea that the curator and artist now closely imitate each other's positions, which is indicative not only of how curating has changed but also of how artistic practice – in particular during the late 1980s and early 1990s – began to incorporate curatorial strategy, methodology and exhibition design.[411] For a comparative example of how artist- and curator-led projects formally and conceptually imitate each other, one can consider the similarities between Liam Gillick's 'Instructions' exhibition, at Gio Marconi Gallery, Milan, in 1992[412] – for which the artist invited other artists to provide instructions for him to carry out in their absence – and Hans Ulrich Obrist's 'do it' project, ongoing since 1993 – for which the curator has invited artists to provide written instructions which could then be executed by the curator, gallery visitors or readers of the instructions instead of by the artists themselves.[413]

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[410] Ibid. p. 237. Heinich and Pollak also refer to a study, conducted by the press service of the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, which noted that a survey of the cultural pages of two French daily newspapers devoting the most space to exhibitions – *Le Monde* and *Libèration* – revealed that both offered numerous examples of this heightened acknowledgement of the curator's role. See also Ibid. p. 248.

[411] Richter, Dorothee. 'Curating Degree Zero', *Curating Degree Zero: An International Curating Symposium*, Eds. Barnaby Drabble and Dorothee Richter (Nuremberg, Verlag für Moderne Kunst, 1999), p. 16.

[412] See Gillick, Liam. Interview with the author, New York, 03/05/04, pp. 2-3. See Appendix One: GI. Gillick describes the project as trying to complicate:

> certain questions of authorship...the idea of the show was how to test the assumption, already in evidence at that point, that people were using the term 'conceptual' to refer to any art that was being produced in Britain at the time that wasn't painting. So I used the old model of doing an instruction show...[asking] Gillian Wearing or Jeremy Deller or Giorgio Sadotti and so on, to give me an instruction that I could carry out in the gallery on their behalf. Now, of course, this kind of model, of taking on something that has already been done and is already well known, is sort of exhausted now from being confronted by exhibition structures that seem to have already been done, but in fact that was definitely part of a testing process that was very self-conscious, about re-testing something that you knew had already been done relatively recently (in the previous twenty years), but doing it again to see what new conditions it would produce and what new situations it would provide, and the most profound discovery from doing it was the absence of the artists was the crucial element, that their work often didn't really sustain any conceptual terms as we would understand them, because so many of the instructions involved doing things like printing a photograph for someone or building something for someone. It became purely an exercise in carrying out, or making someone's artwork, which isn't particularly profound. What was missing was that nuance or presence of the artist.

[413] See http://www.e-flux.com/projects/do_it/homepage/do_it_home.html (accessed 21/02/06)

By considering these two examples, it is clear that there has not only been a conflation of artistic and curatorial practices but also, as Richter identifies, 'it seems perhaps as if a shift in power in favour of the curator has taken place, especially since the role of the curator increasingly allows for more opportunity for creative activity. Thus, the curator seems to employ the artistic exhibits in part as the sign of one text, namely, his or her text.'[414] This opinion was mirrored by Sigrid Schade when she stated that 'curators [now] sell their curatorial concepts as the artistic product and sell themselves as the artists, so the curators "swallow up" the works of the artists, as it were. In such cases, the curators claim for themselves the status of genius traditional in art history.'[415]

In a bid to reduce the perceptual and conceptual distance between curators and artists even further, Justin Hoffmann suggests we apply the term 'culture producer' to those formerly known as artists and curators, as a possible means of dissolving 'the boundaries of the various genres of art.' This would allow protagonists to switch between different areas of activity, thus increasing the potential for articulation within the field.[416] Huber goes a step further by suggesting that there is evidence, within recent curatorial practice, of a 'confiscation of significance' of artistic behaviour. From Harald Szeemann onwards, he claims, artists working curatorially also 'attempt a leap to this meta-level of the curator, using curatorial selection and gallery arrangements to produce their unmistakable, artistic, and societal style on this meta-level.'[417] To support his viewpoint, Huber gives examples of how artists – such as Fareed Armaly, Tilo Schulz, Marina

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[414] Richter, Dorothee. 'Curating Degree Zero', Drabble and Richter, op. cit. p. 16.

[415] Schade, Sigrid. 'Preface', Ibid. p. 11.

[416] See Hoffmann, Justin. op cit. p. 108.

[417] See Huber, Hans-Dieter. op. cit. p. 126. By contrast, Justin Hoffmann proposes that three newer curatorial models have emerged: 1) curators who realise exhibitions without artists, 2) curators who do not curate anything, instead initiating projects and gathering participants together and 3) curators who initiate projects with artists, but without art, where the primary aim is to set art-producing processes in motion, rather than presenting finished products. See Hoffmann, Justin. 'God Is a Curator', op. cit. pp. 103-108. As I have already argued in Chapter Two, since the late 1980s, other institutional and infrastructural issues have come into play that have configured curating as a nomadic international practice centred on the biennial circuit. Alex Farquharson re-iterates this:

> Over the last few years curating has emerged as an academic discipline in its own right, albeit a nascent, necessarily improvised one. On a broader level, the de-centring of the art world over the last ten years or so, intellectually as well as geographically, has produced a demand for a new breed of curator – forever on the move, internationally networked, interdisciplinary in outlook, in command of several languages – who might discern patterns and directions in an increasingly accelerated, expanded cultural field.

(Farquharson, Alex. 'I curate, you curate, we curate', op. cit. pp. 7-10).
The focus on the deployment of artworks as part of a curatorial objective has also been evident since the first postgraduate curating course opened its doors, at Le Magasin, Grenoble, in 1987. Le Magasin's model has been followed, and adapted, by numerous subsequent institutions (including the Royal College of Art, London; De Appel, Amsterdam and École supérieure des beaux-arts, Haute école d'art visuel HES, Geneva). The template for such courses predominantly involves working on a group curatorial project, with the final product usually taking the form of a collectively-curated thematic group exhibition.

Grzinic, Alexander Koch, Christoph Keller, Jutta Koether, and Apolonija Sustersic – have employed the language of curating to create clearly-identifiable signature design styles for their projects.[418] Huber suggests that the artistic desire to employ certain curatorial mechanisms not only arises because this is now seen as the highest and newest form of art, but also because curating provides a means of analysing and contesting what constitutes artistic production, through the confiscation, or appropriation, of the position of power that is identified with the historical figure of the curator.[419] Employing the exhibition site as their medium, these artists produce spatial installations in their own distinct styles which provide the environmental setting for the staging of discussions, events and visitor participation.

One of the many examples that illustrate this point is artist Fareed Armaly's collaboration with Ute Meta Bauer for the exhibition she curated called 'NowHere' at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, Denmark, in 1996. Developing the conceptual framework of the project together, artist and curator worked to 'counterbalance'[420] each other, but it became obvious that Armaly was responsible for how the exhibition looked. Employing many of his signature design elements – such as text applied directly onto partly-painted walls – the manner of display and the accompanying publications could be identified as having Armaly's signature style, while imposing a conceptual framework that was similar to many of his other works.[421]

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[418] Many artists could be added to this list including Liam Gillick, Goshka Macuga, Phillippe Parreno, Superflex, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Gavin Wade and many others, who often move between making autonomous artworks and involving other artists and work in their projects.

[419] Huber, Hans-Dieter. op. cit. p. 126.

[420] See Bauer, Ute Meta and Armaly, Fareed. 'INFORMATION, EDUCATION, ENTERTAINMENT', *Art and Design Magazine: On Curating – the Contemporary Art Museum and Beyond*, No.52, Ed. Anna Harding (London, Academy Editions, 1997), p. 83.

[421] Another example being Sustersic's 'Light Therapy' which was commissioned by curator Maria Lind as a Moderna Museet Projekt. A completely white room, with white furniture, was designed by the artist as a space where visitors were invited to expose themselves to intense artificial daylight, under controlled conditions, as a form of treatment for Seasonal Affective Disorder (a condition common to people living in the Nordic countries where there is little daylight during the winter months). The project was accompanied by workshops, guided tours, film screenings and a lecture programme organised by the artist and curator. See Lind, Maria. 'Introdution', in *Apolonija Sustersic: Moderna Museet Projekt 4.2-14.3 1999*, (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 1999), pp. 6-7.

3.5: The Group Exhibition as an Artistic Medium

The group exhibition as the principal medium of curatorial self-articulation was highlighted in Jonathan Watkins' polemic on curating written in 1987.[422] Drawing on Oscar Wilde's idea that objects are transformed into art by the critic writing about them, Watkins argued for curating as a form of artistic practice, with curated exhibitions akin to Marcel Duchamp's 'Readymade Aided' artworks, whereby the display, or exhibition, is aided by the curator's 'manipulation of the environment, the lighting, the labels and the placement of other works of art.'[423]

Watkins' loose description of the roles taken on by curators/artists/critics within an exhibition context may not be completely synchronous with the departure (over the last twenty years) of curatorial practice from the parameters of gallery or museum exhibition displays. Yet, his belief that the 'invisibility of the curator reinforces the belief that art speaks for itself' and that curating is a 'necessary, if insufficient, medium, through which the communication between art and its audience takes place' remains in tune with the way in which the cross-fertilisation of individual positions within our cultural economy has aided the transformation of artistic practice to include curating as another one of its potential mediums.[424] Within discussion around art, this has seen a move away from an artist-centred cultural hierarchy towards a post-productive discourse, in which the function of curating has become another recognised part of the expanded field of art-making.

The merging, or confusion, of the roles of artist and curator was further outlined in Gavin Wade's text 'Artist+Curator=' published in 2000. In it, he identified a large number of artists who were committed to expanding their practice into the realms of curatorship in parallel to the tendency for curators to act as artists.[425] The term 'artist-curator' is applied by Wade as being loosely synonymous with those practitioners using exhibition design, architectural structures and curatorial strategies as a way of presenting

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[422] Watkins, Jonathan. 'The Curator as Artist', *Art Monthly*, No. 111, (November, 1987), pp. 27-28.

[423] Ibid. p. 27. See also Wilde, Oscar. *The Critic as Artist*, Los Angeles, Sun and Moon Books, 1997 [first published 1890]).

[424] Watkins, Jonathan. op. cit. p. 27.

[425] Wade, Gavin. 'Artist+Curator=' *AN Magazine*, No. 4, (April, 2000), pp. 10-14. Wade's text was accompanied by statements by Kathrin Böhm, Per Hüttner, Tania Kovats and Kenny Schachter, amongst others, in an attempt to clarify how curating and artistic practice, involving some level of collaboration or a combination of roles, had become a common trend by the late 1990s.

themselves, alongside other artists, to create composite public outcomes. In this way, the work of the artist-curator may include the display of autonomous objects, the exhibition design or the provision of an overall curatorial structure as part of their expanded artistic practice. Exhibitions by artist-curators – which once simply meant exhibitions curated by artists – are now a distinctive model of curating, employing the group exhibition as a primary communicative medium as well as the main mode of artistic production.

The burgeoning phenomenon of the artist-curator has many historical precedents, including more overtly politicised artists' curatorial initiatives – such as Group Material and General Idea in the 1980s – whose interventions often exposed un-reflexive assumptions about what constituted an exhibition. As artist Julie Ault describes her involvement with Group Material between 1979-1996:

> [T]he temporary exhibition was a medium through which models of social and representational structures were posited, and through which rules, situations, and venues were often subverted. Specific exhibition projects evolved from and expanded upon the collaborative process of discursive engagement, its principles of practice.[426]

For John Miller, the momentum of this convergence of practices – the artist as curator and the curator as artist – had already been building up through work linked to forms of Institutional Critique, by artists such as Julie Ault, Judith Barry, Louise Lawler, Group Material and Fred Wilson working in the US in the 1980s.[427] Taking curatorial prerogatives and the works of other artists and employing them as part of their own practice, Group Material made a plea for the understanding of 'creativity unrestricted by the marketplace or by categories of specialization.' As a means of expressing a desire for an alternative to the autonomy of the artist, the curator and the critic, they set about redefining the role of curating from the position of a group of artists working together on exhibitions.[428]

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[426] Ault, Julie. 'Three Snapshots from the Eighties: On Group Material', *Curating Subjects*, op. cit. p. 32. Ault's essay provides a detailed account of Group Material's exhibitions between 1981 and 1989.

[427] Miller. John. op. cit. p. 59. Miller argues that Jan Höet's technique of 'confrontational hanging' was less about the exposure of 'non-reflexive assumptions about what makes up an exhibition and what that might mean' – which would have been in keeping with these artists' curatorial interventions – and more about 'the wilfully arbitrary juxtaposition of works [which] equates artistry with free exercise of subjectivity.'

[428] See Drobnick, Jim. 'Dialectical Materialism: An Interview with Group Material', *AIDS Riot: Artist Collectives Against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*, Eds. 12th Session of the École du Magasin (Grenoble, Le Magasin, 2003), pp. 278-79. This interview was first published in *Parachute*, 56, (October-December, 1989), pp. 29-30.

As a mutating collective active between 1979 and 1996, Group Material employed the space of exhibition-making for potential political and social manifestations, using the exhibition form as a shared site of participation between individuals, and the event of the exhibition to enable a social forum. Exhibitions, such as 'The People's Choice' (1981), subverted the manner in which the display of art had become standardised and challenged how such formations had been established. By disrupting the conventional museum collection model, 'The People's Choice' presented material as determined by non-professionalised cultural experts, with local people being invited to contribute items from their homes to the exhibition on East 13th St, New York. In the context of their first institutional exhibition, at the 1986 Whitney Biennial, 'Americana' was a *salon des refusés* of marginalised artists, with their socio-political concerns being exhibited alongside products from supermarkets and department stores. In questioning the function of cultural representation and the hierarchies of cultural production, this broke down the boundaries between high and low culture. 'Democracy: A Project by Group Material', at the DIA Art Foundation between 1987 and 1989, was organised as a cycle of discussion-led events and collaborative exhibitions divided into four sections: Education and Democracy; Politics and Election; Cultural Participation and AIDS and Democracy: A Case Study.[429] By taking on a wide range of issues, united by an interest in the complexities of classification and display techniques and a notion of the exhibition as a public event, all of these projects posited curating as a collaborative approach to exhibition organisation and production.

The emphasis on the artist-curator within more recent group exhibitions is less focused on Institutional Critique, but nonetheless concerned with how work might be displayed and mediated within an exhibition's concept. More often than not, the results are presented as a combined exhibition-work, made up of other artwork components, supported by a unifying conceptual, physical and structural display system. A long list of recent artist-curator initiatives in the UK, Europe and the US has included significant

[429] For reviews of 'Democracy: A Project by Group Material' see Denson, G. Rodger. 'Group Material, "Education and Democracy"', *Artscribe*, (May 1989), pp. 84-85 and Berger, Maurice. 'Open Art: Out of the Gallery, Into the Streets.' *Village Voice*, (6 August, 1991) unpaginated. See also Drobnick, Jim. op. cit. pp. 275-294 for four published interviews with the group recorded between 1989 and 2003. For a background to the exhibitions mentioned herein, see Ault, Julie. op. cit. pp. 31-38. The results of the 'Democracy' discussions and documentation of the four exhibition installations were published in *DEMOCRACY: A Project by Group Material*, Ed. Brian Wallis (Seattle and New York, Bay Press and Dia Art Foundation, 1990). See also 'AIDS Timeline' in Avgikos, Jan. 'Group Material Timeline: Activism as a Work of Art', *But is it Art? The Spirit of Art as Activism*, Ed. Nina Felshin (Seattle, Seattle Bay Press, 1995), pp. 85-116; *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, Ed. Suzanne Lacy (Seattle, Seattle Bay Press, 1995), pp. 223-224; *Art After Modernism*, Ed. Brian Wallis (New York, The New Museum with Godine Publications Inc., 1985), pp. 352-354; Armstrong, Richard et al. *1985 Biennial Exhibition*, (New York, Whitney Museum, March 1985), pp. 46-47 and Dector, Joshua. 'Group Material', *Flash Art*, 145, (March/April, 1989), p. 111.

exhibitions, events and collaborative projects by 16BeaverSt, Artlab (Charlotte Cullinan and Jeanine Richards), Dave Beech, John Bock, Cell Projects, Jeremy Deller, Flatpack, Liam Gillick, Matthew Higgs, Per Hüttner, Pierre Huyghe, IRWIN, Goshka Macuga, Mobile Porch (Kathrin Böhm, Stefan Saffer and Andreas Lang), Dave Muller, Philippe Parreno, Sarah Pierce, Superflex, Atelier Van Lieshout, and Gavin Wade among many others. Outcomes are diverse, but often result in a slippery game of simultaneous role-play, where the conceiver and producer are both artist and curator.

For example, Goshka Macuga's 'Kabinett der Abstrakten', at Bloomberg Space, London, in 2003, was comprised of a selection of artworks installed inside her sculptural environments, with Macuga's contribution to the project including the overall concept, the selection of works by other artists and the production of an exhibition design within which the works could be seen.[430] Macuga also designed a library of privately-loaned books and art objects and two totemic sculptural pillars, influenced by the work of Kasimir Malevich, which were used to display a clay figure and small sculptures by Ben Parsons and Jacqui Chanarin. Macuga's exhibitions hark back to a utopian moment of early modernist display systems, when design was used as a means of producing new experiences. While paying homage to artists past and present, through the production of new ways in which their work can be displayed and consumed, the trait that is most apparent in her exhibitions is the fact that they are clearly demarcated and mediated as the combined work of one artist.[431]

Another exhibition from 2003 – 'I am a Curator' by Per Hüttner at London's Chisenhale Gallery – employed an even more convoluted approach than that of Macuga. Hüttner invited the public to make proposals to curate a series of one-day art exhibitions in what

[430] Her previous exhibitions employed similar strategies, including: 'Picture Gallery' at Gasworks in 2003 – an ambitious reproduction of the flexible, unfolding picture gallery at the Sir John Soane's Museum; and 'Cave' at Sali Gia Gallery in 1999 – a cavernous display environment made from packing materials and crumpled brown paper, evocative of the Surrealist 'Eros Installation' at the Corderie Gallery in Paris in 1959, as well as the environments of Allan Kaprow and Claes Oldenburg from the early 1960s. For Bloomberg, Macuga presented a constructed cabinet, made up of four independent shelves contained within a single display unit, which were opened for visitors by a Bloomberg gallery guide. It included loaned artworks by Andy Warhol and Peter Liversidge and artefacts such as a 'space dog suit' from a Soviet experiment dated 5 October, 1959. This was reminiscent of Jeremy Millar's inclusion of the helmet worn by Donald Campbell during his successful world land speed record attempt, in the exhibition 'The Institute of Cultural Anxiety' at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1994. In fact, in exhibitions curated by artists – from Joseph Kosuth's 'The Play of the Unmentionable' at the Brooklyn Museum, New York (1990) to Hans Haacke's 'Viewing Matters' at the Museum Boijmans van Beuningen (1996) and 'Mixed Messages' at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Serpentine Gallery (2001) and from Richard Wentworth's 'Thinking Aloud' at the Camden Arts Centre (1999) to numerous displays by Fred Wilson, Mark Dion, Haim Steinbach, and Cummings and Lewandowska – the insertion of everyday and historical objects into art exhibitions has become a curatorial trope.

[431] See O'Neill, Paul. 'I am a Curator', *Art Monthly*, No.275, (April, 2004), pp. 7-10.

was disingenuously described in the press release as 'an experiment in democratising the curatorial process.'[432] Six invited international curators, including Hüttner, provided a selection of artworks from which gallery visitors could select. Artist-curator Gavin Wade and architect Celine Condorelli designed a customised environment for the gallery: a flexible display structure which doubled-up as a storage unit for the artworks available for selection by visitors (via index cards designed by Scott Rigby). With the results from each day documented and uploaded onto the gallery's website, thirty different permutations of the artworks occurred during the project at the instigation of budding curators and non-curators alike.[433] In this way, the exhibition was put forward as the work of art and the work of art as the exhibition, which resulted in a mediation of the artist as the curator and the curator as the artist.

By shifting the emphasis away from work being chosen by the curator, projects by curators have questioned the relationship between curatorial selection and exhibition display. Examples are Jens Hoffmann's 'Exhibitions of an Exhibition' at Casey Kaplan Gallery, New York, in 2003 – for which he invited four young curators to write a text (to be available in the gallery) explaining the makeup of his exhibition, with the objective of providing four different 'curated shows' rather than one curatorial perspective;[434] 'Artists' Favourites: ACT I and II' – for which Hoffmann invited artists to select the works that were included – and 'London in Six Easy Steps' – for which he invited six curators[435] to curate an exhibition for one week under one title – at the ICA in 2004 and

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[432] See press release for 'Per Hüttner: I am a Curator.' Chisenhale Gallery, London, 5 November-14 December, 2003.

[433] The presence of Condorelli and Wade's transformative display system was puzzling given that the gallery itself provided an efficient architectural context for each potential exhibition display. Wade, who has collaborated with both Hüttner and Macuga on numerous projects, also provided 'support systems' for the aspiring curator. Aimed at assisting decision-making, these included a list of things to do if you were stuck; a selection of games including Jenga and Connect 4; phone numbers of well-known contemporary curators from his own 'little black book' of curators; contact details of local material suppliers, shops and merchants and an excellent library of literature on curating. Many of these supportive elements could have produced their own cohesive curatorial project and, like other exhibition designs by Wade, the presence of an overall central support structure already produced a rather all-enveloping display aesthetic. Hüttner's aim was to produce new 'experiences' of curating and he claimed that his project 'starts with the question: what are the intentions of the artist, and are those intentions more fruitful than the interpretation of the visitor?' As a statement of intent, it suggests a degree of neutrality on behalf of the conceiver. If 'I am a Curator' is the answer, then to who is the question being addressed and who is defining the terms of this reductive curatorial engagement in the first place? See O'Neill, Paul. 'I am a Curator', op. cit. p.10. Both of these exhibitions were mediated as the work of the artist with the name of the artist and the title of the exhibition placed at the top of each press release: 'Goshka Macuga: Kabinett Der Asbstrakten' and 'Per Hüttner: I am a Curator', respectively. For documentation of these projects, see 'Goshka Macuga: Kabinett der Abstrakten.' *Press Brochure*, London, Bloomberg Space, 2003 and *I am a Curator*, Ed. Per Hüttner (London, Chisenhale Gallery, 2005).

[434] See Williams, Gregory. 'Exhibitions of an Exhibition', *Art Forum*, (October, 2003). Found at www.findarticles.com/cf_0/m0268/2_42/109023360/print.jhtml (accessed 21/05/06).

[435] The six exhibitions were: Catherine Wood's 'Emblematic Display', B+B's (Sarah Carrington and Sophie Hope) 'Real Estate: Art in a Changing City', Tom Morton and Catherine Patha's 'Even a Stopped Clock Tells the Right Time Twice a Day', Guy Brett's 'Anywhere in the World: David Medalla's London', Gilane Tawadros's 'The Real

2005 respectively. 'For 'Artists' Favourites: ACT I and II', Hoffmann invited over forty artists to select one of their favourite works of art by another artist, made between 1947 and 2004. In his introductory notes for the exhibition manual/guide, Hoffmann wrote, 'The significance of the artworks is altered as it becomes apparent that, in this context, they stand not only for themselves or the artists who created them, but also represent the artists who selected them and the motives behind their selections.'[436]

A critique of Hoffmann's curatorial proposition was most clearly expressed by Art & Language who selected *Fairest of Them All*, 2004, by Charles Harrison. This was a framed text panel, sitting upon a lectern-like plinth, spotlit from above, to read:

> The exhibition is founded on and seeks to perpetuate a mystification, disguising the fact that artists have already been drawn into the condition of the curator. It is curatorial-and-worse work that the institution requires of the artist. The authors of the 'Summary' and the 'Narrative' attest to this, albeit unwittingly. But the mystification comes unstuck rather easily. In appearing to make a real distinction between artist and curator the organisers have proposed a single negation: 'artists are not curators.' In fact, the curatorial presence in the exhibition has been doubled. The result is a double negative: the artist is simply not not a curator. And that's in fact how it is. A different kind of work is needed if we are to reshape the distinction and reintroduce a critical negation.[437]

For Art & Language, the artist is already a curator and the fact of who makes the final selection for an exhibition does not provide a clear distinction between the roles of artist and curator; rather, it reinforces the role of the artist as curator as part of a wider curatorial/institutional malaise. But what Hoffmann's projects illustrate is that the role of the curator no longer primarily involves the selection of existent works, nor supplying an overarching narrative thread relating works to one another, but the provision of a framework, or curatorial structure, through which exhibitions eventually gather form. In the new curatorial rhetoric, the emphasis is on flexibility, temporality, mobility, interactivity, performativity and connectivity. This new-found urgency to seek a common language is exemplified by the number of international curators who have treated exhibitions as a collective activity, using them as a means to explore the processes of art production, through temporary mediation systems, rather than presenting

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Me' and Gergor Muir's 'The George and Dragon Public House'. See *London in Six Easy Steps*, Ed. Jens Hoffmann (London, ICA, 2005).

[436] Exhibition Brochure/Press Release, *Artists' Favourites: ACT I and II.* (London, ICA, 2004).

[437] See O'Neill, Paul. 'Self-reflexivity, Curating and the "Double Negative Syndrome" in *Artists' Favourites: ACT I* and *ACT II.* ICA, London, 5 June-5 September, 2004', *The Future*, No. 1, (2004), p. 10.

art and its exhibition as a finished product. Many curators who have gained an international reputation over the past ten years – such as Ute Meta Bauer, Nicolas Bourriaud, Hou Hanru, Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Eric Troncy and Barbara Vanderlinden – have developed a curatorial methodology that has moved towards a more performative and dialogical model of curating. As already outlined in Chapters One and Two, these shifting perspectives may be regarded as a reaction against, or response to, the heavily authored, über-curated mega-exhibitions of the 1980s.

The idea of an exhibition as an ongoing, expanding project which evolves over time was described by Hans Ulrich Obrist. Discussing his idea of exhibition productions being in a continuous state of flux, as an incomplete process of changing ideas rather than one of finite curatorial disclosure, he stated:

> Instead of certitude, the exhibition expresses connective possibilities. The question of evolutionary displays. An ongoing life of exhibitions. Exhibitions as complex, dynamic learning systems with feedback loops, basically question the obsolete idea of the curator as a master planner. As you begin the process of integration, the exhibition is only emerging. Exhibitions under permanent construction, the emergence of an exhibition within an exhibition. This idea of renouncing or questioning a master plan also means that, very often, organising an exhibition is to invite many shows within the shows, almost like a kind of Russian Matroyshka doll.[438]

A key illustration of this move is found in the ongoing project 'Utopia Station'[439] – co-curated by Molly Nesbitt, Hans Ulrich Obrist and Rirkrit Tiravanija – which attended to such issues by focusing on a collaborative exhibition framework rather than selected artists or works. It was described in the press release as:

> Nothing more or nothing less than a way station, a place to stop, to look, to talk and refresh the route...as a whole [it] should be understood to be the composite of its many layers, each unfolding at different speeds in different times and places: seminars, meetings, stations, posters, performances and books are coming en route.[440]

The 'Utopia Station' project displays many of the curatorial strategies familiar from Obrist's previous exhibitions – such as 'do it' (ongoing since 1993) or 'Take Me (I'm Yours)' (from 1995) and 'Cities on the Move' (curated with Hou Hanru 1997-2000) –

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[438] Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'Panel Statement' *Curating Now: Imaginative Practice/Public Responsibility*, Ed. Paula Marincola (Philadelphia, Philadelphia Exhibitions Initiative, 2001), pp. 23-24.

[439] First included as part of Francesco Bonami's 2003 Venice Biennale and later shown at Haus der Kunst, Munich, 2004.

[440] See http://universes-in-universe.de/car/venezia/bien50/utopia/e-press.htm (accessed 12/12/04).

which employed very many artists, emphasised process over product, mediated the exhibition as a flexible structure, brought the visitors into play, instructed artists to fulfil specific roles and conceived the exhibition as a mobile unit that could take on numerous forms over time. By foregrounding mediating strategies within the design, structure and layout of the exhibition, the curatorial element of 'Utopia Station' was intended to be as dominant as the works of art. By placing emphasis upon the visitors' experience of the exhibition-as-event and by presenting a total installation focusing on the exhibition as a singular site of evolutionary display that involved artists' participation at different levels – whether it was Rirkrit Tiravanija's design of the display structure, Liam Gillick's design for the seating or the 158 artists asked to contribute a poster to date – the curatorial strategy detracted from a consideration of individual artworks. In their statement of intent, the curators alluded to terms like 'non-plan', 'portability', 'multiplicity', 'temporality' and 'flexibility' in an attempt to break down any discernible boundaries between individual artistic statements and the overarching exhibition assertion, while employing the exhibition as a site for programmed discussions, events and performances.[441]

In spite of these obvious conflations and convergences, between the once-disparate roles of artist and curator, and the many projects that have questioned the curatorial framework since Jonathan Watkins' polemic was published in 1987, the issues inherent in the curator-as-artist formulation remain key within curatorial discourse. Writing for his regular column in *frieze* in 2005, curator Robert Storr expressed his concerns about the notion of the curator-as-artist by refusing to call curating a medium since that 'automatically conceded the point to those who will elevate curators to the status critics have achieved through the "auteurization" process.'[442] Like Watkins before him, Storr also situates the origins of the idea of the curator-as-artist in Oscar Wilde's 1890 essay 'The Critic as Artist' (where it is the eye of the beholder that produces the work of art) rather than in Barthes' post-structuralist analysis of authorship.[443] Storr's viewpoint evokes Michel Foucault's warning, that 'the task of criticism is not to bring out the work's relationship with the author, nor to reconstruct through the text a thought or

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[441] Ibid. See also www.e-flux.com/projects/utopia and Nesbitt, Molly, Obrist, Hans Ulrich, and Tiravanija, Rirkrit. 'What is a Station?' *50th Biennale di Venezia: Dreams and Conflicts – The Dictatorship of the Viewer*, Eds. Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa (Venice, Marsilio, 2003), pp. 319-415.

[442] Storr, Robert. 'Reading Circle part one', *frieze*, No. 93, (September, 2005), p. 27.

[443] See also Barthes, Roland. 'The Death of the Author', *Image-Music-Text*, (London, Fontana Paperbacks, 1977), pp. 142-148.

experience, but rather to analyse the work through its structure, its architecture, its intrinsic form, and the play of its internal relationships' as well as considering the relationship of each author's work to both their own wider body of work and to that of other authors working within any field of discourse.[444] As a curator-critic writing for an art magazine, Storr's conclusive response, 'No I do not think that curators are artists. And if they insist, then they will ultimately be judged bad curators as well as bad artists'[445] reinstates the artist/curator divide and inadvertently returns the power of judgement to the critic – Robert Storr. This view was echoed in my 2005 interview with Storr when he stated that the idea of:

> [The] curator as auteur is another version of the idea that the curator is an artist, and that what we're more interested in is the thought of the curator in relation to something more than we're interested in the works and their relation to each other, and I'm pretty much trying to avoid this idea as much as I can.[446]

Storr's final dismissal of any portrayal of curating as a mode of authorship is simultaneously a rejection of the idea of exhibitions as mediated texts, where a text is a 'multi-dimensional space'[447] in which a variety of 'theological' meanings and messages are emboldened, passed on and openly available to the reader, the viewer, the translator. As Roland Barthes may have put it, Storr's response is 'to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing' as he conceives of the notion of the curator/author of the text as being either absent from or 'beneath the work in question' rather than an active producer of the exhibition as an authored or co-authored text – and 'when the Author has been found, the text is "explained" – victory to the critic.'[448] Storr's rejection of the notion of curating as a form of authorship appears to support a narrow understanding of the parameters of contemporary curatorial and artistic practice, which may stem from his career as a curator at MoMA from the late 1980s until 2005.[449] There was evidence of a restricted understanding of what constituted the role of the curator in his portrayal of his experience at MoMA, when he stated:

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[444] See Foucault, Michel. 'What is an Author?' *The Foucault Reader*, Ed. Paul Rabinow (London and New York, Penguin Books, 1984), p. 103.

[445] Ibid. p. 27. See also O'Neill, Paul. 'The Co-dependent Curator', *Art Monthly*, 291, (November, 2005), pp. 7-10.

[446] Storr, Robert. Interview with the author, Brooklyn, 30/03/05, p. 20. See Appendix One: ST.

[447] See Barthes, Roland. op. cit. p. 146.

[448] Ibid. p. 147.

[449] See Storr, Robert. Interview with the author, op cit. pp. 1-4. See Appendix One: ST.

> I think actually at the Modern, because of their editorial possibilities, they did not want to use 'curate' as a verb, they wanted to use 'curator' as a noun only... And I think there is some important distinction because curators are essentially responsible for collections, whereas making an exhibition may or may not draw on a collection but it isn't the same activity.[450]

So, perhaps Storr's statement in *frieze* was informed by an experience of curating confined to the context of a museum, but this does not excuse his limited grasp of the diversity of curatorial practices, which have been emerging beyond the museum structure since as early as the 1960s. Storr's argument against the curator-as-artist does not allow for the simultaneity, convolution or embodiment of today's curator-artist; nor does it allow for the inversion of the art-as-curating equation, for post-conceptual art projects in the guise of curatorial initiatives such as 'do it' (as a late conceptual artwork); 'Blown Away: The Sixth Caribbean Biennial' (as a performance); 'File Megazine', 1968-88 by General Idea, (as a magazine/exhibition/multiple artwork that published the group's own ideas alongside those of other artists); 'Art Metropole', ongoing since 1974 by General Idea, (as a curatorial project/art shop/bookshop/gallery and, most importantly, as an artwork)[451] and 'Reena Spaulding's Fine Art' (a real commercial gallery in New York as an artwork based on a work of fiction by artists' collective The Bernadette Corporation, established in 2005).[452]

Storr's refusal to recognise curating as a medium is not an isolated standpoint; in fact, it represents one of the ongoing tensions around what actually distinguishes the work of the curator from that of the artist. In all the interviews I carried out, not one curator ever argued for being an artist, yet many supported the idea of curating as a mode of production. The briefest glance at some of the statements, made by a generation of curators to have emerged in the 1990s, demonstrates how their understanding of curating differs radically from that of Storr, instead supporting a view of curating that is akin to creative authorship and production. For example, artist and curator Gavin Wade stated that the only distinction for him between the artist and the curator is that 'the artist and the art are primary and the notion of curating

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[450] Ibid. p. 2.

[451] See Bronson, AA. Interview with the author, New York, 28/05/2004, pp. 8-10. See Appendix One: BR.

[452] For a description of Reena Spaulding's Fine Art and its foundations, see my interview with John Kelsey and Emily Sundblad. Kelsey, John and Sundblad, Emily. Interview with the author, New York, 01/04/05, especially pp. 2-4. See Appendix One: KE.

and being a curator has to be secondary and so it always comes down to the fact that really you're an artist and it's art, that the role of the curator is to make art.'[453]

By contrast, for Nicolas Bourriaud, curating is part of the technical 'vocabulary' used to author exhibitions which, in themselves, result in forms of materialised 'language'.[454] For Nicolaus Schafhausen, all exhibitions involve some degree of 'curatorial authorship' because 'curatorial practice has nothing to do with democracy' in terms of how art gets selected or displayed; for him, all exhibitions involve an element of curatorial dictatorship, regardless of the extent to which the activity of the curator is prioritised in the resulting exhibition.[455] Schafhausen goes on to make a distinction between the authorship of an exhibition, on the one hand, and being an artist or curator on the other. For him, 'a curator is not an artist, but curating is an artistic production; it's like being a director, but this does not mean that you are using the individual artists.'[456] Likewise, for curator Eric Troncy, there is always a two-way arrangement between the curator and the artist in which the work of the artist and the curator operate on equal creative terms with one another. He describes the 'serious work of a curator' as having 'unexpected ideas, to avoid subjects, and to propose a temporary experience of art that does not explain what the artworks are, but tries to be at the same level as the artworks themselves.'[457]

As I have suggested, Storr's position is not an isolated one. The critic (and sometime curator) Irit Rogoff[458] and curator Bart de Baere claimed earlier that, as identity-staging events mobilising different modes of audience participation, curatorial projects too often employ 'curatorial strategies that dictate to audiences their mode of participation in the exhibition in the guise of a democraticization of a cultural experience – [but instead they] work to achieve precisely the opposite – they close off the possibilities for a self-articulation'[459] on the part of their audiences. In 2003, Alex Farquharson (a curator since

[453] See Wade, Gavin. Interview with the author, London, 02/06/05, p. 1. See Appendix One: WA.

[454] Bourriaud, Nicolas. Interview with the author, Paris, 27/01/04, p. 1. See Appendix One: BO.

[455] Schafhausen, Nicolaus. Interview with the author, London, 15/10/04, p. 8. See Appendix One: SC.

[456] Ibid. p. 8.

[457] Troncy, Eric. Interview with the author, 28/10/05, p. 3. See Appendix One: TR.

[458] Rogoff is also Director of a new MPhil/PhD programme in 'Curatorial Knowledge' at Goldsmiths, University of London since 2007. For details of this course see http://www.goldsmiths.ac.uk/visual-cultures/curatorial-knowl.php

[459] See De Baere, Bart and Rogoff, Irit. 'Linking Text', *Stopping the Process: Contemporary Views on Art and Exhibitions*, Ed. Mika Hannula (Helsinki, NIFCA, 1998), p. 129. In another essay, Rogoff further illustrates her position through a critique of both Hans-Ulrich Obrist's curated exhibition 'Take Me (I'm Yours)' at the Serpentine Gallery, London (1995) and Christine Hill's *Thrift Shop* at Documenta X (1997) as exemplars of models of participation predicated on a predetermined strategy. Rogoff's

the late 1990s) similarily called into question exhibitions that foregrounded their own sign-structure, which risk 'using art and artists as so many constituent fibres or pieces of syntax subsumed by the identity of the whole' curatorial endeavour.[460] He argued that we are more likely to remember who curated 'Utopia Station' than which artists took part, forgetting that Rirkrit Tiravanija (an artist) was one of the curators. For Farquharson, projects such as Obrist's 'do It' and 'Take Me (I'm Yours)' or Hoffmann's 'A Little Bit of History Repeated' (Kunst-Werke Berlin, 2001) result in a relegation of artists to the status of mere envoys of the curators' conceptual premises, while curatorial conceit acquires the status of quasi-artwork.[461] This common opinion seems to yearn for the primacy of the cultural value of the artist over the curator, which raises serious problems for the overall question of advocacy within the art world.

According to Maria Lind, since the 1990s there has been a general antagonism towards the shift in favour of the curator, and continual attempts to defend the autonomy of the artistic position. Echoing Adorno, it is often argued that many curatorial projects prevent artists from realising their 'true potential', with attempts to prioritise the curatorial component of a given project being seen as having quite serious implications for the status, and perceived roles, of art and artists.[462] Lind claims that she is 'very influenced by artistic practice, so many of my ideas and many of the methods I use come from looking at artwork and talking to artists' and, while she underlines that 'the starting point

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issue with curatorial projects which involve instructive viewer participation is not their effect, but the curatorial assumptions that sustain them. Such assumptions – about the 'processes of democratizing cultural institutions by giving audiences some mechanical task to carry out and involving the materials of every day life; old clothes, chewed gum, newspapers, anonymous photographs etc.' – Rogoff claims, ensures that little attention is paid to the power bases of the institutions themselves, to audience needs and to the potentiality of their legitimate voice; whereas, the familiar, popular and everyday nature of the material exhibited is 'galvanised to act out some fantasy of democracy in action.' See Rogoff, Irit. 'How to Dress for an Exhibition', Hannula, op. cit. p. 142. To illustrate Rogoff's position further, one could also include as examples many subsequent exhibitions that invoked prescribed modes of audience participation and social interaction such as 'Utopia Station' at the 2003 Venice Biennale – which involved the ready distribution of publications, posters and bags (designed by Agnes B) to visitors – and the practice of many of the 'service-providing' artists associated with Relational Aesthetics. See Bourriaud, Nicolas. *Relational Aesthetics*, (Dijon-Quetigny, Les Presses du Réel, 2002). 'Relational Aesthetics' was the term used by Bourriaud to represent the common interests of a group of artists practising during the 1990s, such as Liam Gillick, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Philippe Parreno and Rirkrit Tiravanija. He defined Relational Art as a 'set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space.' Relational Aesthetics was defined by Bourriaud as an 'aesthetic theory consisting in judging artworks on the basis of the inter-human relations which they represent, produce or prompt' through common forms of artistic practice that transcend their objectivity to include participation and programmed social interstices between people within the context of the exhibition event. See pp. 112-113 and p. 14. For a critique of Bourriaud's analysis of art in the 1990s, see Bishop, Claire. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics', *October*, 110, (Fall, 2004), pp. 51-80. See also Farquharson, Alex. 'Curator *and* Artist', *Art Monthly*, No. 270, (October, 2003), pp. 13-16 and O'Neill, Paul. 'Curating U-topics', *Art Monthly*, No. 272, (December-January, 2003-04), pp. 7-10.

[460] Farquharson, Alex. 'I curate, you curate, we curate', op. cit. p. 10.

[461] Ibid. pp. 7-10.

[462] Lind, Maria. 'Stopping my process? A Statement', Hannula, op. cit. p. 239.

is art itself, the artworks themselves',[463] Lind makes clear that any reverence towards the artist as the sole creative force behind art where the work of art is put forward as the results of autonomous production would carry its own problematic. For Lind, the portrayal of art having creative potentiality that is undone by curatorial intervention seems suspiciously close to the idea of art as an isolated activity that is detached from the rest of our existence, perhaps also concealing a belief in the idea of the curator as a 'pure provider' of support for artists, without affecting the exhibition, artistic production and its reception.[464] Instead, Lind proposes a hybridised curatorial position combining 'the role of the provider, who creates possibilities for producing and exhibiting art, as much as possible on the artists [sic] own terms, with the creator or Harald Szeemannian or auteur, who thinks and feels through, who digests, historical and contemporary culture.'[465] She states that the provider role 'is often procreative, in the sense of helping to produce and exhibit new work without other artists and the works being too close' whereas the later position, 'of the creator, discerns patterns and poses questions, makes suggestions and strives to make exhibitions more than the sum of their parts.'[466]

The expressed desire for the maintenance of the cultural value of the artist over the curator within contemporary art exhibitions also represents problems for the overall question of advocacy within the art world. Gertrud Sandqvist warns that the curated exhibition is not supposed to merely reinforce the identity of the artist or the curator. Instead of regarding curating (and the curated exhibition) as 'one of the rare, more intellectual positions in the process of art-circulation', as Sandqvist proposes, there is a danger that curators become mere agents for an artist or group of artists, and 'risk functioning as a kind of trademark' on behalf of each other; if the exhibition is what Sandqvist calls 'a condensation point, or a producer of meaning' in the form of a specific text when 'the context at once creates and destroys the production of meaning' then the purpose of each curated exhibition is different from that of the art market and, possibly, also from that of the artist.[467]

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[463] Lind, Maria. Interview with the author, Munich, 31/10/04, p. 1. See Appendix One: LI.

[464] See Lind. Maria. 'Stopping my process: A Statement', op. cit. p. 239.

[465] Ibid. p. 240. See also Lind, Maria. Interview with the author, op. cit. p. 2.

[466] Lind, Maria. 'Stopping my process? A Statement', op. cit. p. 240.

[467] Sandqvist, Gertrud. 'Context, Construction, Criticism', Drabble and Richter, op. cit. pp. 43-44.

Lind also acknowledges what Reesa Greenberg called 'discursive events',[468] to describe how exhibitions can be part of a process that creates dialogical spaces of negotiation between curator and artist. The exhibition offers a momentary site of discussion between those involved and their audiences, as 'a statement or a question which is meant to be a cultural conversation.'[469] This co-operative, process-orientated, discussion-based view of exhibitions was manifested by a new generation of curators emerging in the 1990s, when curators and artists worked together closely on projects with one another as well as adopting activities that were traditionally associated with each other's approach within their specific fields of enquiry. These collaborations happened on the basis that concealing the curator's role, as something akin to a neutral provider, only reinforces a Modernist myth that artists work alone, their practice unaffected by those that they work with, at a time when artistic and curatorial practice converged in a variety of projects seeking to undermine the understanding that the production of art, its reception and its meanings could ever occur without external advice, suggestion and intervention from 'procreative' curators, critics, and production partners.[470]

Increasingly, dialogical approaches to exhibition production are being undertaken, with curators tending to work closely with artists on an aspect of the overall exhibition schema, as determined by the curator, or on longer co-productions.[471] As curatorial work has become more collaborative, exhibitions have tended to include non-specialist art practitioners and to involve participation across cultural fields of enquiry. In the context of more recent curating, the triangular network of artist, curator and audience is replaced by a spectrum of potential inter-relationships. Such a shift in the understanding of art's authorship, as something beyond the hand of an individual, acknowledges the idea that art is neither produced in isolation nor should it be understood as being autonomous from the rest of life. As Charles Esche has written, 'We are all collaborators in the pursuit of the art experience as a transformative, hopefully life-enhancing thing.'[472]

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[468] Discussed in Chapter Two.

[469] See Lind, Maria. 'Stopping my process? A Statement', op. cit. p. 240.

[470] Ibid. pp. 239-40.

[471] For example, when Maria Lind curated 'What If? Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design', at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 2000, she invited artist Liam Gillick to participate as a 'filter' through which the artworks would take shape in the design and layout of the exhibition. Delegating responsibility to an artist to make the installation decisions meant that dynamics within the design of the exhibition occurred that may not have been possible had the curator taken sole responsibility. The same is true of 'Utopia Station', for which Rirkrit Tiravanija realised the exhibition design and Liam Gillick designed the seating. There are numerous other examples of artists – such as Julie Ault, Martin Beck, Judith Barry and Josef Dabernig – working as exhibition designers with curators.

[472] See Esche, Charles. 'Curating and Collaborating: A Scottish Account', Hannula, op. cit. p. 249.

Exhibitions are a co-productive medium, resulting from varying forms of collaboration, some of which make the curatorial framework more manifest than others. Contemporary curatorial practice has become a key component within art discourse. For those unwilling to accept the provision made for the figure of the curator within the reconfigured cultural field of production, critical response has been maintained at the level of an oversimplified antagonism, in which the practices of artist and curator are kept separate from one another. For those (artists or curators) who have accepted curating as another medium of art production, the formulation of the creative curatorial position within such discourses since the 1990s has been made possible through multifarious group exhibition models that have been used as a means of contesting the critical and aesthetic autonomy of art and the mediation of artistic value. The rise of the curator in the 1990s has also demonstrated that art has never been produced in a creative vacuum, while curatorial discourses arising during this period have shown that those responsible for the mediation of art are just as responsible for how art and culture is discussed, presented and produced.

PART TWO: PRACTICE-LED RESEARCH

Curating as Research Practice; Research as Curatorial Practice: Four Curated Exhibitions with Three Principal Categories of Organisation: the *Background*, the *Middle-ground* and the *Foreground*

Introduction

This section describes four public exhibitions to have taken place alongside my theoretical and historical research between 2003 and 2006:

1. 'Coalesce', ongoing since 2003 – to date, the project has taken the form of four exhibitions at London Print Studio Gallery (2003); Galeria Palma VI, Villa Franca, Spain (2004); The Model and Niland Gallery, Sligo (2005) and Redux, London (2005).
2. 'TONIGHT', Studio Voltaire, London, 2004.
3. 'La La Land', Project Gallery, Dublin, 2005.
4. 'General Idea: A Selected Retrospective', Project Gallery, Dublin, 2006.

This text forms a supplement to my main thesis and is accompanied by an illustrated PowerPoint presentation which documents the projects (submitted as Appendix Two).

The four exhibitions under examination were directed by my primary research and are presented here as practical outcomes that respond to some of the dominant issues emerging throughout my research. Each of them marks a shift in my own curatorial practice, away from working primarily with the selection of existing artworks in the context of a group exhibition, towards a more collective curatorial methodology. This was achieved by working directly with artists on every aspect of the exhibitions' production, from the exhibition design and layout of specific works for the exhibition space to working together on the overall installation. As a means of examining certain key concepts that emerged during the research process, my curatorial practice and research developed alongside, and were influenced by, each other. This text aims to make this interconnectivity evident through a retrospective account of the exhibitions' outcomes.

The group exhibition has not only opened up a range of curatorial approaches to the exploration of artistic practice, but it has also enabled divergent artistic practices to be

exhibited together under a single rubric.[473] Whereas the monographic exhibition presents the artist as its central subject, I have argued that the group exhibition presents the curator as the most visible producer of meaning for the work(s). As demonstrated in the body of this thesis, the group exhibition has, since the late 1980s, become the primary site for curatorial experimentation and, as such, represents a new discursive space around artistic practice. The four exhibitions I realised during my research constituted an investigation into how the curatorial role is made manifest, through collaborative and collective exhibition-making structures applied through close involvement with artists during all stages of the exhibition production.

Throughout the series of exhibitions, there is an intentional balance inherent to each curatorial methodology articulated – through the exhibition form and the space of production for art made specifically for the exhibition – in which each participant within the exhibition becomes part of a dialogical structure, mediated from the outset by the curator. What I proposed through these exhibitions was that there is no grand narrative, no single way of reading the exhibition as a work, or of clearly separating out the curatorial and artistic work therein. In each project, artists responded to a curatorial proposition, strategy or imposed structure which resulted in artworks that would not have emerged without such orchestration. At the same time, each curatorial structure was responsive to each artist's practice, which always remained the starting point for the propositions.[474]

In order to focus on the spatial context of the exhibitions, I decided to resist the implementation of thematic displays of related works, whereby selected artworks would have been forced to collectively adhere to a single theme. The artists were not there to illustrate any overarching subject, nor were the works arranged so as to demonstrate a coherent inter-textual relationship between one another. Instead, I considered the exhibition as a setting for the staging of spatial relations between works, and between viewers, with curating as the activity that structures such experiences for the viewer and

[473] The thematic group exhibition emerged as a formative model for defining ways of engaging with such disparate interests as exoticism, feminism, identity, multiculturalism, otherness, and queerness. As argued in my main thesis, the ubiquity of the biennial model since the 1990s – and the consistency of such exhibitions in being centred on an overarching trans-cultural, cross-national and inclusive thematic structure – has helped to define the modes of art's engagement with a variety of socio-political and global cultural topics. Through their diversity of outcomes, group exhibitions have also offered an alternative to more traditional Western museum exhibition paradigms, such as the monographic or genre exhibition, or the permanent collection. See Enwezor, Okwui. Interview with the author, Bristol, 04/02/05. pp. 3-6. See Appendix One: EN.

[474] See O'Neill, Paul interviewed by Fletcher, Annie. 'Introduction', *Curating Subjects*, Ed. Paul O'Neill (Amsterdam and London, De Appel and Open Editions, 2007), p. 18.

for the work. I considered the exhibition as providing three potential planes of interaction, with the exhibition considered to be an organised built environment which:

1) surrounds the viewer who moves through it.
2) the viewer interacts with only partly.
3) contains the viewer in its space of display.

I employed the metaphor of the exhibition as landscape which I applied to each exhibition as a means of establishing a formal structuring device, responsive to these three planes of interaction, available to the viewer. Susan Stewart describes our understanding of landscape as an experimental relationship to the natural, and built, environment, which envelops the viewer. For Stewart, 'our most fundamental relation to the gigantic is articulated in our relation to landscape, our immediate and lived relation to nature as it "surrounds" us.'[475] As a question of scale, landscape is that which encloses us visually and spatially, 'expressed most often through an abstract projection of the body' upon the world.[476] As we can only interact with the world in part and it does not move through us, we must move through it. The metaphor of the exhibition-as-landscape also acknowledges the spatial world as a display space. Applying Stewart's understanding of landscape (and the gigantic) as a 'container' of objects and mobile viewing subjects[477] to our experience of the exhibition – as that which surrounds us and which we can only know partially – one can deduce a rejection of the notion of the autonomous objects of art as the primary medium through which the ritualised and ritualising experience of art takes place. This perception is then replaced by a desire for an understanding of these rituals at the level of the space of exhibition(s).

Carol Duncan defined the viewer's relationship to (museum or gallery) exhibitions as one that is organised and experienced within 'marked off, "liminal" zone[s] of time and space in which visitors, removed from the concerns of their daily, practical lives, open themselves to a different quality of experience.'[478] For Duncan, the organisation of the

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[475] Stewart, Susan. 'The Gigantic.' *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham and London, Duke University Press, 1993), p. 71.

[476] Ibid. p. 71.

[477] Ibid. p. 71.

[478] Duncan, Carol. *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 20. Duncan is referring specifically to public museums and their collections, and how they operate as powerful cultural agents that have shaped history, and our relationship to how it is experienced through methods of display. Through their architectural symbolism, installation designs and spatial settings, Duncan argues that the museum's ritualistic

exhibition setting also acts as 'a script or scenario which visitors perform' in a semi-aware state, in a prescribed, closed off spatial-temporal zone, separated from the world outside. It was my ambition to reduce the closed-off, neutralising effects of the white-walled gallery space but, instead of merely rejecting the gallery setting as a structured, restrictive framing device, I focused on revealing the ritualised exhibition space as an extension of the world outside the gallery. In addition to this, the exhibitions were considered as sites at which visitors were invited to perform as viewing subjects, as part of what Duncan called the 'civilising rituals' of the experience of art and culture; namely how art museums and galleries organise a ritualised reception of the objects they display, in terms of their 'associat[ion] with religious practices – with the realm of belief, magic, real or symbolic sacrifices, miraculous transformations, or overpowering changes of consciousness', all of which is structured in such a way as to present an ordered world to the contemplative community of art spectators.[479] For Duncan, the experience of the exhibition space is organised for the viewer through the 'arrangement of objects, its lighting and architectural details [that] provide both the stage set and the script' for gallery visitors to perform their experience of culture in a prescribed manner, with the exhibition site operating as the framework of this experience that has been passed down over time and understood by its users as a space of performed reception.[480] Such an ameliorated reception of art and objects of cultural value disguises the ideological forces behind such 'cultural experience[s] that claims for its [exhibited] truths the status of objective knowledge.'[481] All exhibitions structure ritualised practices for audiences within 'those sites in which politically organised and socially institutionalised power most avidly seeks to realise its desire to appear as beautiful, natural, and legitimate.'[482] It was my intent to consider in practice, how the ritual site of exhibition is structured for

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associations have constructed ideological values, authority and cultural behaviours through which viewers experience, and become used to, universal civilising rituals. Much of what Duncan refers to with relation to the museum space and how we experience space, time and objects in the museum space could equally be applied to temporary exhibitions. I would argue that the viewer within art galleries or temporary exhibition displays act out these inherited traditional rituals of 'enlightenment, revelation, spiritual equilibrium or rejuvenation.' See Ibid. p. 20. This was ultimately the main thesis of Brian O'Doherty's essays first published in 1976, where he argues that the space of the gallery operates as a timeless, sacred, and ritualised context for the reception of art. See O'Doherty, Brian. *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London, University of California, 1999).

[479] Ibid. p. 8.

[480] Ibid. pp.12-13.

[481] Ibid. p. 8.

[482] Duncan, Carol. *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, (London and New York, Routledge, 1995), p. 6.

the viewer at each stage of the curator's involvement in the organisation of an exhibition's contents, display and spatial arrangement.

Structured around three spatial categories – the background, the middle-ground and the foreground – these terms of classification were used as a system for ordering material, as three prescribed terms of reference for thinking about how exhibitions are constructed. These spatial co-ordinates were then utilised as organisational strategies through which the exhibition could consider the proximity of the viewer to each of the artworks as well as to the exhibition display, with respect to exhibition production as a form of co-authorship. Each artist or artwork was then selected to respond to one of the three organisational parameters. An account of each of these speculative organisational categories follows:

1. The background was considered to be the architecture of the exhibition space, the primary layer of the exhibition under discussion. The white walls of each gallery were at least partly painted, covered, or pasted over and converted from a blank space into a dominant aesthetic experience. In this way, the neutral effects of the 'white cube' were reduced to a minimum and replaced by a visual background that was decided upon by an invited artist, or group of artists, in discussion with the curator.

2. The middle-ground became an area with which audiences were intended to interact. It could be described as the manner in which the exhibition design and the layout of the exhibition space was organised – prior to the placement of artists and their works – and the way in which such elements function within the overall organisational framework of a group exhibition. Display structures, gallery furniture, seating, and overall exhibition design were considered prior to the exhibition installation, with the middle-ground utilised as a means of conditioning and mobilising the exhibition viewer in prescribed ways. These elements were either adapted – from pre-existing artworks – for the exhibition or commissioned as novel display systems, designed in close collaboration with an artist.

3. The foreground represented a space of containment, in which the viewer was requested to take part in a subject-to-object relationship with those artefacts, images and works of art that could be categorised as autonomous objects for study in their own right. Such works arrived in their complete form and left intact after the event of the

exhibition. These included video work, sculpture, or paintings on canvas that could not be adapted or changed by curatorial intervention, each of which requiring certain inherent conditions of display. Such work necessitated detailed scrutiny and invited a close reading of the individual artist's intentions within the curatorial framework of the exhibition.

The three organisational categories described above were not only employed to facilitate the selection of works for each exhibition but also intermingled into the final exhibition form. I shall now outline the four projects in brief before providing a more detailed description of each individual project and demonstrating how they overlap curatorially. In each case, my primary focus will be on the central, overarching, curatorial structure rather than the artworks on display. Centred on four distinct exhibition strategies, each project overtly articulated my curatorial role, with each curatorial outcome making evident not only the discursive exchange between my activities as an artist-curator and the activities of the artists themselves, but also the resulting exhibition-form produced by these processes. For each project, the curatorial role was devised and adapted around distinct strategies, prioritising a curatorial model of working closely with artists, as opposed to a more traditional, museological approach to curating discrete artworks.

While all four exhibitions were responsive to the unique gallery contexts for which they were commissioned, there were intentional connections, structural attributes and curatorial overlaps between them. In order to clarify how this connectivity was manifested, explored and developed over the duration of a three-year research period, I shall now outline each project individually.

1. 'Coalesce': A Continually-Evolving Exhibition

'Coalesce' is the title of an ongoing exhibition project, begun in 2003 at London Print Studio Gallery, which has so far been realised in four different venues as four distinct exhibitions, each one evolving from its previous incarnation(s), with artists, Kathrin Böhm, Jaime Gili and Eduardo Padilha as constant collaborators throughout (fig. A2. 1).[483] Each public exhibition has taken the form of a mutating environment of overlapping artworks, whereby individual artworks and curated projects literally

[483] Documentation from all four manifestations to date are viewable on the website www.coalescent.org.uk which shows documentation of each exhibition and represents the development of the project over the past three years.

'coalesce' and co-habit in the exhibition space, and each time the title has been retained whereas a new subtitle is introduced in order to distinguish each outing from the other. The multiple outcomes of 'Coalesce', across locations and times, form part of a continuum, with the project being considered as an unending exhibition with artists being added for each new outing. For each exhibition the artists work collectively on an installation, with their work(s) literally merging into each other, resulting in an overall group exhibition form rather than an accumulation of discernible, autonomous, individual artworks. The overall exhibition grows over time, at different speeds and with varying modes of display, reminiscent of Hans Ulrich Obrist's description of his 'Cities on the Move' project, which evolved over time at various locations:

> The exhibition would happen through happenstance. Within the exhibition one could draw an analogy to a network where the exhibition was less a tree or a linear graph but much more of a superposition, a frequency of events of crossings, of how this complexity little by little builds up. I don't only mean complexity in terms of spatial situations; I also mean the growing complexity of dialogue.[484]

'Coalesce' – like Obrist's 'Cities on the Move' (co-curated with Hou Hanru at various venues between 1997 and 2000) and 'Utopia Station' (an ongoing exhibition and research project, co-curated with Molly Nesbit and Rirkrit Tiravanija, active since 2003) – foregrounds mediating strategies by emphasising exhibition design, structure and layout, all of which are intended to be as dominant as the individual works of art. The project has served as a research engine which has enabled subsequent curatorial projects to emerge, including 'TONIGHT', 2004 and 'La La Land', 2005, whose curatorial structures borrow from that of 'Coalesce'. Much more than these two outcomes, 'Coalesce' forcefully and self-consciously takes the exhibition production as its central organising principle, with the aforementioned background, middle-ground and foreground each offering a grounding, or platform, for one another. For the sake of clarity, I shall describe only two of these manifestations in detail, that at Model and Niland Art Gallery, Sligo (2004) and the most recent outing at Redux, London (2005).

At the Model and Niland Art Gallery, the background of the exhibition was formed by Tod Hanson, Kathrin Böhm and Jaime Gili, with these three artists remaining involved in the creation of the background environment throughout the 'Coalesce' manifestations. Hanson's exhibition-specific wall painting acted as the primary layer of the exhibition, responding to the architecture of the gallery, as his painting spread across and through the rooms of the gallery (fig. A2. 2). Produced in situ, it was then overlaid with posters

[484] See Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'Time Storage, Kraftwerk, Laboratory', Wade, Gavin. op. cit. pp. 45-57.

and prints by Kathrin Böhm and Jaime Gili[485] from their respective ongoing print projects that respond directly to the spatial make-up of each specific exhibition environment (fig. A2. 3). These three artists worked together to create an environment of overlapping projects that coalesced into a collective installation and their works were not clearly demarcated or separated from one another; instead they formed a composite installation that would act as a backdrop for the other works on display. One such work was Aleksandra Mir's 'No Smoking' signs which were dispersed throughout the exhibition space and incorporated into the building's signage system (fig. A2. 4).

The middle-ground comprised Clare Goodwin's painted and fabricated sculptures, produced on site using the cardboard packaging supplied with television monitors (fig. A2. 5). These functional sculptures were used as plinths upon which the video works would be displayed. Isabel Nolan's floor-based work *Death Creeps In* (2003) (fig. A2. 6)[486] and Eduardo Padilha's floor sculptures provided seating for the gallery visitors to use while viewing the video works (fig. A2. 7). Padilha's work is constructed of a combination of textiles from abandoned mattresses, which he finds, collects, washes and takes apart. The mattress materials are then used to produce new sleeping bags, each one being a hybrid of different patterns meticulously stitched into shape to provide a place to sit and/or rest within the exhibition.

The subtitle for this particular outing of 'Coalesce' – 'With All Due Intent' – was provided by Lawrence Weiner, alluding to his wall-text 'happenstance with all due intent', which greeted visitors upon entering the main gallery space (fig. A2. 8). As well as being a work in its own right, Weiner's subtitle clarified how chance and happenstance produce contextual interrelationships between works, whereby individual artistic styles overlap with one another. The intention was to make it difficult to decipher where one artist's work ended and the next began. Paintings by Willie McKeown and Jack B.Yeats comprised a painting exhibition, overlaid onto the background, each painting providing a link to the outside world, through McKeown's sky paintings (fig. A2. 9) and Yeats' depiction of a mountain top viewed through a window frame – the same mountain that is visible through the window located opposite the painting in the gallery in Sligo (fig. A2. 10)

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[485] For more information about Gili's projects see www.jaimegili.org

[486] See *Untitled (As Yet): Yugoslav Biennial of Young Artists Vrsac*, Eds. Sinisa Mitrovic, Ana Nikitovic and Jelena Vesic (Belgrade: Centre for Contemporary Arts, 2004), Unpaginated.

For 'Coalesce: With All Due Intent', a selection of films and video works was made by curatorial duo B+B (Sarah Carrington and Sophie Hope) and integrated into the exhibition. B+B's programme, entitled *Coalesce Cinema*, brought together works from the B+B video archive, each of which dealt with issues of trans-cultural identity, social activism, and co-habitation across Europe; their subject matter presenting diverse perspectives and experiences of migration in a changing Europe and operating as B+B's articulation of what they believed to be the overall exhibition's concerns based on their interpretation of my curatorial structure. These documentary films were clearly delineated as individual works by each artist.[487] Unlike the rest of the work(s) on show, the films were labelled individually and presented to the gallery visitor as autonomous pieces. Due to their durational dimension, these works demanded significantly more of the viewers' time than other works in order to be experienced in their totality. A number of the videos were projected in black boxes with the sound played aloud, while others were shown on single monitors with headphones, placed upon the display plinths provided by Claire Goodwin's sculptures (fig. A2. 11).

Following the exhibition in Sligo the project continued, in a scaled down form, at Redux in London as 'Coalesce: The Remix' (2005). Again, the same artists – Hanson, Gili and Böhm along with Lothar Götz – were invited to work on a collective, site-responsive installation at the gallery, which would form the visual backdrop to a series of four curated events/projects, each of which used the gallery as a studio or research space for one week, culminating in a launch night. The production of the 'Coalesce' environment and the middle-ground of Padilha and Goodwin took place over the course of the first week, with the artists working on-site together with the curator (see figs. A2. 12, 13, 14, 15).[488]

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[487] The artists shown as part of *Coalesce Cinema* were Ursula Biemann & Angela Sanders, Esra Ersen, Jacup Ferri, Adla Isanovic, Sejla Kameric, Tadej Pogacar & P.A.R.A.S.I.T.E Museum of Contemporary Art, Marko Raat and Helmut & Johanna Kandl. Each layer within 'Coalesce' offered alternative levels at which to experience and interact with the works presented. The gallery walls, panels, ceilings and floors were covered with works that overlapped physically and conceptually to produce both a comfortable and, at times, disconcerting exhibition. Playful abstraction rubbed up against complex issues that included cross border control, migrancy, black market prostitution and homelessness, primarily by artists working in the context of former Eastern Europe.

[488] The project was launched at the end of the first week with a public programme of video screenings of works by artists Oriana Fox, Anthony Gross, Cyril Lepetit, Stefan Nikolaev, Harold Offeh, Mark Orange and Marko Raat, each work representing and documenting the artist's attempt to understand a socio-cultural setting alien or foreign to their own.

For the subsequent three weeks of the exhibition, Sarah Pierce, Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson, and temporarycontemporary (Anthony Gross and Jen Wu) were each invited to curate their own intervention within the exhibition. In most cases, the gallery was open to the public during these times, when the visitor could see the evolving curatorial works in progress. Each new curator could utilise the gallery space according to their needs, on the understanding that the background of the previous exhibition could be added to, but nothing could be removed from the gallery space. The curators were asked to respond to the environment in relative ways and the exhibition space was made available for use according to the logic of each curatorial initiative in dialogue with the next. These curatorial interventions operated as the new foregrounds to the exhibition, installed on top of, or functioning within, the initial 'Coalesce' environment. All three consecutive projects were unaffected by any further curatorial input and each outcome had a public launch night following a week of research and production within the gallery (fig. A2. 16).

Following the initial launch of the 'Coalesce' environment, Dublin-based artist-curator, Sarah Pierce, organised 'The Metropolitan Complex', as a series of ongoing exhibitions of archives and the publications of transcript proceedings, resulting from formal meeting and informal exchanges.[489] Pierce responded to my invitation with a request that we swap our places of residence for the duration of her project. I lived in Dublin for one week and Pierce stayed in London, during which time she selected books from my library and personal material from my home. This research provided a starting point for private conversations with a number of individuals Pierce had arranged to meet in the 'Coalesce' environment at Redux in London. The gallery space at Redux was used as an office for closed meetings between Pierce and a number of London-based artists and curators who were invited to take part in recorded interviews, to be played in the gallery at a later time.[490]

During the third week, Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson produced a special issue of the occasional journal *The First Condition.* This took the form of a photocopied A5 booklet available free at the gallery. The journal consisted entirely of written texts, which were the result of Beech and Hutchinson gathering critical responses to the curatorial concept

[489] For further information on this project, including documentation of previous publications and archives by Pierce see www.themetropolitancomplex.com

[490] These invitees included Jeremiah Day, Maria Fusco, Peter Lewis, Elizabeth Price and Grant Watson.

of 'Coalesce', with all participants from the various strands of the project, including visitors to the exhibitions, invited to take part in the publication.[491]

During the final week of the project, the team of temporarycontemporary curated three symbolic group exhibitions, each of which involved a group of artists taking part in a private poker game within the gallery (fig. A2. 17). In this metaphorical situation – with curators as dealers and exhibitors as gamblers – the card-playing became a stand-in for the to-ing and fro-ing of socialised cultural production. The gallery was transformed into a lounge with Goodwin's sculptures as drinks tables and Padilha's sleeping bags as rest areas. The sessions were filmed using techniques appropriated from televised poker, with a specially-constructed table allowing for under- and over-head footage to be recorded. The resulting documentation was edited and presented on television monitors on the final preview night, in conjunction with a newly-commissioned work by artists Nicole and Leesa Abahuni, which involved the installation of mirrors across the gallery floor, walls and ceiling and resulted in the production of multiple reflected images of the gallery space and its visitors (fig. A2. 18).

As an evolving series of exhibitions, the intention of 'Coalesce' is to accommodate a cross-fertilisation of different artistic and curatorial positions within a single unifying curatorial project over an extended period. Through a collective, methodological approach to the process of exhibition-making, there is a disruption to each individual curatorial endeavour, resulting in the conflation of the exhibition form and an intermingling of different curatorial languages. The exhibitions are proposed as open works, subject to, and dependent upon, the participation of other practitioners. Each exhibition manifestation is put forward as a temporary space of dialogue between these participants and is proposed as a condensed moment of potential collaboration, exchange and co-production. The core objective is to denounce the position of the curator as a master planner and the notion of the exhibition as a moment of order with a stable outcome. Each manifestation of 'Coalesce' has produced an exhibition within an exhibition, within a larger exhibition that evolves over time.

[491] The texts were also posted on the website: www.thefirstcondition.com (accessed 21/06/05)

2. 'TONIGHT': An Exhibition Structured around Instruction

'TONIGHT' was a non-thematic exhibition, whereby all exhibited work was provided by the artists according to their choice, rather than being selected by the curator for their inter-related properties. Any meanings that emerged through the juxtapositions of work were, therefore, accidental rather than intentional; any visible interconnections between works in proximity to each other were arrived at randomly.[492] The exhibition was non-thematic, in the sense that the works did not illustrate a central theme in order to maintain, as clearly as possible, the distinction between what I was exploring as a curator and how the selection of the work on display was made. I wanted to avoid the idea of the curator as an arbiter of taste, making decisions based on subjective understandings of the inherent quality, or value, of the selected works.[493]

The curatorial intention of each exhibition was to mediate what artists do while in the act of making work, rather than focusing on the works themselves, their titles, mediums, or intended meanings. In turn, this emphasised the curatorial framework rather than any narrative running through the exhibition. 'TONIGHT' explored the idea of art-making as a temporal activity, an act of killing time, of whiling the night away, doing something perhaps mundane, radical or obsessive, in order to make the passage of time material. All of the works included had taken time to make, but their production was not limited to one single period of time.

It is important to acknowledge that, in spite of the self-conscious curatorial strategy within all my projects, it was always artists, or certain work(s) by a single artist, that functioned as the starting point for each project. In the case of 'TONIGHT', the title of the exhibition was derived from an earlier work by Pavel Büchler, who was invited to participate. *Tonight*, 2003 came about when the artist found a small scrap of paper – a fluorescent pink sticker with TONIGHT! on it – which had fallen off a poster for an

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[492] As a means of setting up the exhibition as an experimental and speculative proposition, rather than as the arrangement of works as a finite curatorial statement, I used a series of questions for the gallery hand-outs that accompanied the poster/user-guide such as: 'What could you be doing right now?' 'What do artists do other than make art, whilst making art?' 'What are they doing when they are making work?' 'Do artists make work?' 'What else is being exhibited?' 'Can an exhibition of diverse works be without a theme?' 'Are curated exhibitions over-interpretive and over-interpreted?' 'How can a lot of artists co-exist within a single exhibition without getting lost amongst other works?' 'Is getting lost a good thing?' 'Are exhibitions designed or curated?' 'Are exhibitions something be 'looked' at?' 'Can an exhibition be used/useful?' 'Are exhibitions spatial-play?' 'Are exhibitions strategic?' 'Is strategy strategic?' 'Why do we have large group exhibitions?' 'Are exhibitions a representation of community?' 'How useful are questions in themselves?' 'Can exhibitions be self-critical?'

[493] For reviews of 'TONIGHT' at Studio Voltaire, see Schmitz, Edgar. 'Tonight...und dann immer weiter.' *Kunstforum*, 171, July-August (2004), pp. 398-99. Lambrianou, Nick. 'TONIGHT,' *a-n Magazine*, (June, 2004), p. 6.

unknown event (fig. A2. 19). Photographing this piece of paper, Büchler used it as the source for an edition of fly-posters. *Tonight* was placed on and around public sites in Manchester, pasted up next to other posters publicising forthcoming club nights, concerts and events (fig. A2. 20). The posters, which included only the enlarged word 'TONIGHT!' advertised nothing more than the word itself and its encoded signification. The exhibition 'TONIGHT' was a retroactive response to Büchler's suggestion to take part in the doing of something tonight. It was a gathering-together of the results of a selection of things that had been done and a list of a number of possible things that could be done.

'TONIGHT' was accompanied by a poster/exhibition user manual designed by Liam Gillick, who was invited to adapt Büchler's original work, using it as the basis of his own work, in a similar way to that in which Büchler had adapted part of another poster for his work *Tonight* (fig. A2. 21). Gillick's poster doubled up as a user guide with which visitors could navigate the exhibition. The posters were distributed to visitors at the entrance to the exhibition. On the reverse side of the poster, a list of artists' activities was provided, corresponding to the individual activity they had carried out in order to produce their work. Each participant had been asked to complete the sentence 'Tonight, I...' and to contribute a single work that represented the individual activity/process of production that had taken place on a particular night of his or her choice .[494] For

[494] The full list of statements were:
1) Tonight, I was mugged by a rubber band.
2) Tonight, I corrected the Press Release for 'Tonight.'
3) Tonight, I reflected on some things I regret in my treatment of women.
4) Tonight, I gave people vocal chord stimulation through their feet.
5) Tonight, I looked at the sky.
6) Tonight, I will try to count one million stars.
7) Tonight, in the soporific communal lounge, the old punk whiles away his twilight hours.
8) Tonight, I picked up a word from the night before.
9) Tonight, I am speculating about the future.
10) Tonight, I wondered – not in any knowing, arch, self-conscious, pseudo-obsessive way as an artist, but just as a person – what kind of setbacks might befall the 'Tonight' exhibition. But more than late arrivals of work, fights over wall space, and the emailing list being out of date, other odd things like an illness... something to do with the railway track at the back... another thing, with a light... some missing money... a bad coincidence... and something duplicated... And then I wondered whether I could just about visualise the outline of these events because all the circumstances that would cause them had already begun and existed with me here, in the present, tonight.
11) Tonight, I ironed my younger brother's shirts.
12) Tonight, 30 October 2003, we plan to meet our friends Scott and Leigh Rigby, who run Basekamp Gallery in Philadelphia, and who have just arrived in the UK. One of us may go to an opening of work by Keith Wilson at One in the Other Gallery.
13) Tonight, I began to make up a tune by humming and then gave up.
14) Tonight, I painted 1-20 without the number 13.
15) Tonight, I am inappropriately in the bodies of those whom I may never meet.
16) Tonight, I read the classics.
17) Tonight, I made a small cartoon mushroom-cloud flocked in psychedelic colours.
18) Tonight, I made a CD-rack.
19) Tonight, I redesigned someone else's poster.
20) Tonight, I will paint the Sistine Chapel.
21) Tonight, I made Peter Lorre travel through time.
22) Tonight, I will stay at home and listen to a record.

example, Lawrence Weiner supplied the sentence, 'Tonight, I asked Kim Weston to sing what I have been thinking and perhaps have people desiring to dance to it'. The audio work, resulting from this action, was played throughout the gallery, of Kim Weston singing Weiner's *Statement of Intent* (1968): '1. The artist may construct the work 2. The piece may be fabricated 3. The piece need not be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to the condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership.'[495]

The length of each of the activities described by the artists, and the artwork produced as a result, was not strictly limited although most of the artists either structured their production around a finite period of time or addressed issues inherent to the temporality of production. The relationship between the words that artists use to describe the activity involved in their production process and how these words translate into the materialised language of the resultant work, was made apparent by inviting each artist to write a line of text that would best describe the process or activity involved in the making of their individual work. These lines of individually numbered texts were compiled into a list of fifty acts printed on the user manual. This list provided a means of

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23) Tonight, I decided which of my existing works to include in the exhibition.
24) Tonight, I wrote some quasi-logical propositions about the implications of displaying bricks and 'decoy' bricks (i.e. things which are made to be mistaken for bricks) in an art gallery.
25) Tonight, I cut out pictures of engines.
26) Tonight, I watered my garden.
27) Tonight, I changed direction.
28) Tonight, I turned into smoke.
29) Tonight, I bring new life to cold dinners.
30) Tonight, I am driving around the edge of the city, remembering.
31) Tonight, I witnessed Oculist.
32) Tonight, my plans are open.
33) Tonight, I opened my eyes.
34) Tonight, I did something wrong.
35) Tonight, I made a short video re-enacting what happened two nights ago.
36) Tonight, I just walked in to check what condition my condition was in.
37) Tonight, I became Coco Brown.
38) Tonight, I will be "Toyota Corolla."
39) Tonight, I faithfully followed this instruction.
40) Tonight, I permanently became a camera and now I'm no longer what I was.
41) Tonight, I collaborated with at least 3 other artists.
42) Tonight, I loose [sic] myself in Art.
43) Tonight, I am a megaphone.
44) Tonight, I made thumbtacks out of Sculpey.
45) Tonight, I tried to hack into the computer of the Chinese Ministry for Foreign Affairs and replace the word "Revolution" everywhere with the word "Chocolate."
46) Tonight, I collated the documentation I had made about a piece of art that was made about time.
47) Tonight, I have asked Kim Weston to sing what I have been thinking and perhaps have people desiring to dance to it.
48) Tonight, I sellotape my glove to you.
49) Tonight, I will be painting.
50) Tonight, I will be.....

[495] First published in the exhibition catalogue for 'January 5-31, 1969', curated by Seth Siegelaub at his gallery in New York during the same dates. Republished in Fietzek, Gerti and Stemmrich, Gregor. *Having Been Said: Writings & Interviews of Lawrence Weiner 1968-2003*, (Ostfildern-Ruit, Hatje Cantz, 2004), p. 21.

reading the individual works in the gallery and departed from the standard exhibition wall labels, title sheets and lists of works. None of the exhibited works were titled; instead, each activity listed on the poster corresponded to a numbered list of artists' names. This enabled a mapping of the exhibition space from one activity to the next, from one artwork to the next, without the use of titles or labels. 'TONIGHT' functioned as a predetermined space for temporal ideas about individual artistic practice.

For the installation, in order to accommodate the large volume of non-wall-based work, a central display system was designed with artist Anthony Gross (fig.A2. 22).[496] Fifty artists[497] and their works were packed into the gallery space at Studio Voltaire, to produce an over-sensitised 'atmosphere room',[498] akin to a kindergarten full of activities intended to evoke a certain sensibility and 'immerse the visitor' in an exhibition that offered multiple forms of interaction with the displayed works (figs.A2. 23). These ranged from the architectural interventions surrounding the visitor, to smaller works – such as tactile sculptures like Jonathan Monk's *Rubik's Cube* in a vitrine that could be changed once a day by only one gallery visitor, Georgina Batty's *Bread Making Machine* which made bread every morning for the gallery invigilators, or Markus Vater's *Faxed Drawings*, where the artist sent one new drawing to the gallery via a fax

[496] The initial ideas for the design of the structure were derived from those of Alexander Dorner (curator at Landsmuseum, Hanover from 1922) whose revolutionary ideas for gallery and museum displays supported a view of contemporary art exhibitions as temporary sites for 'elastic', 'mobile', 'evolutional' and 'flexible' forms, rather than museums as spaces for the permanent display of collected works. See Obrist, Hans Ulrich. 'Time Storage, Kraftwerk, Laboratory', *Curating in the 21st Century*, Ed. Gavin Wade (Walsall and Wolverhampton, The New Art Gallery Walsall/University of Wolverhampton, 2000), pp. 45-57. Obrist has been key to bringing Alexander Dorner's ideas to the fore and many of Dorner's innovations – such as employing artists to design dynamic display systems as artworks within his museum, adapting the building through flexible display systems as well as retaining states of transformativity within the exhibition – have been a huge influence on Obrist. Many of his exhibitions such as 'Cites on the Move' and 'Utopia Station,' have taken up and explored Dorner's ideas through their evolutionary approach to exhibition designs and transfomativity, both within single exhibition displays and in these exhibition projects which have had numerous public outcomes in different forms over a sustained period. See also Dorner, Alexander. *The Way Beyond 'Art' – The Work of Herbert Bayer*, (New York, Wittenborn, Schultz, Inc., 1947).

[497] The artists were: 1) Georgina Batty, 2) Simon Bedwell, 3) Dave Beech, 4) Ólöf Björnsdóttir, 5) David Blamey, 6) Kathrin Böhm, 7) Ian Breakwell, 8) Pavel Büchler, 9) Gerard Byrne, 10) Adam Chodzko, 11) Declan Clarke, 12) Cornford & Cross, 13) Jeremy Deadman, 14) Mark Dickenson, 15) Jeanette Doyle, 16) Markus Eisenmann, 17) Matt Franks, 18) Babak Ghazi, 19) Liam Gillick, 20) Andrew Grassie, 21) Brian Griffiths, 22) Anthony Gross, 23) Matthew Higgs, 24) Mark Hutchinson, 25) Gareth Jones, 26) Janice Kerbel, 27) Brighid Lowe, 28) Frank Lüsing, 29) Caroline McCarthy, 30) Ronan McCrea, 31) Goshka Macuga, 32) Aleksandra Mir, 33) Jonathan Monk, 34) Suzanne Mooney, 35) Hayley Newman, 36) Stefan Nikolaev, 37) Harold Offeh, 38) Mark Pearson, 39) Elizabeth Price, 40) Lindsay Seers, 41) DJ Simpson, 42) Bob and Roberta Smith, 43) Mark Titchner, 44) Mungo Thomson, 45) Markus Vater, 46) Christopher Warmington, 47) Lawrence Weiner, 48) Annie Whiles, 49) Ian Whittlesea and 50) Michael Wilkinson.

[498] According to Mary Ann Staniszewski, while restructuring the Landsmuseum in Hanover during the 1920s, Alexander Dorner created, what he called, 'atmosphere rooms', intended to evoke the spirit of the period begin represented and to 'immerse the visitor as much as possible, in each specific culture.' The atmosphere rooms 'displayed a progressively evolving, historically differentiated representation of art and culture.' The Renaissance rooms were white or grey, to emphasise the cubic nature of the rooms and the geometric space adhered to by the period. The Baroque room was red velvet, with the paintings in gold frames, and Rococo colour schemes were pink, gold and oyster white. See Staniszewski, Mary Anne. *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art*, (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1998), pp. 16-22.

machine every night, or numerous text-based works that could be picked up and read in situ, such as Simon Bedwell's *Corrected Press Release for TONIGHT*, where the artist corrected my press release for the show, or Gerard Byrne's *Review of TONIGHT*, a critique of the exhibition, set out on an A4 page in the style of the review pages from *Art Monthly*, written by Byrne prior to the opening of the exhibition and based on his assumptions as to what the exhibition would look like.

Two of the gallery walls were covered in background works commissioned by the curator: covering one wall, a site-responsive painting by Liam Gillick (fig.A2. 24, 25) and, on another, a room-scale collage by Kathrin Böhm (fig.A2. 26). Both Gillick and Böhm were invited to design a work that would be architecturally specific to the gallery at Studio Voltaire, each covering the walls of the gallery from floor to ceiling and/or wall to wall. These works operated as a visual backdrop to the dense display of artists' works, some of which were placed over the surfaces of Gillick's geometric painting and Böhm's colourful collage. The gallery functioned as a container of distinct ideas, each flowing into, over and, literally, on top of one another.

The *Flexible Curatorial-Play Unit* was the solution arrived at to enable so many works to be exhibited in one contained space. It was made up of eight separate units based on the modular design of Charles and Ray Eames' *Eames Storage Units (ESU)* from 1950, in which the flexibility of the units allowed for a variety of combinations which could easily be adapted to the changing display needs of the artists during the installation of the exhibition.[499] This provided a unifying exhibition-display system in the middle of the gallery (fig.A2. 27) which acted as a functional sculpture intersecting the physical space of the gallery without restricting the spectator's view of the entire exhibition of works (fig.A2. 28). The structure could be walked around and, at any given time, was visible from three sides including the top surfaces of each component, which were employed as plinths for some of the sculptural works on display. The eight cabinets lined up in a row also provided a tabletop for reading material, while a series of shelves and drawers built into the structure were adapted to accommodate individual works such as video, audio and object-based works. Some of the cabinet doors remained closed to provide vertical

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[499] For a brief illustrated description of *Eames Storage Units (ESU)* see Koenig, Gloria. *Charles & Ray Eames: 1907-1978, 1912-1988*, (Cologne, Taschen, 2005), pp. 52-53. Albrecht, Donald. 'Design is a Method of Action.' *The Work of Charles and Ray Eames: A Legacy of Invention*, Ed. Diana Murphy (New York, Harry N. Abrams, Inc. Publishers, 2005), pp. 22-23.

surfaces which could be detached and reattached to the structure elsewhere. Parts of the structure were transparent, allowing views through to the adjacent walls of the gallery. The structure was also malleable and adjustable according to each artist's needs.

'TONIGHT' was installed with a clearly defined, layered approach; there was an intentional disruption to certain aspects of the curatorial activity, such as the decision to invite artists to select their own works, all of which were unconditionally accepted by the curator. While the artists were instructed to respond to a specific brief, there was no curatorial selection process in relation to which work was included. There was no restriction placed upon the artists by the curator in terms of how they could respond. A deliberate tension was created between the visibility and invisibility of the curatorial gesture, whereby the curatorial role was not concerned with quality control or defined by a coherent selection of works, instead all submitted works were accepted regardless of how effectively they responded to the instructive framework provided by the curator's initial invitation (fig.A2. 29).

3. 'La La Land': Exhibition-Making as a Series of Background works

Following 'TONIGHT', I felt compelled to further explore the extent to which the background could be foregrounded and become a more central aspect of exhibitions, by bringing traces of Liam Gillick and Kathrin Böhm's ongoing projects into future exhibitions in a more overt, explorative and transparent manner. I considered the possibilities of working through four exhibition projects that would develop with similar methodological approaches and with some of the same artists involved.

The exhibition 'La La Land' proposed an experimental, self-reflexive approach to the term 'exhibition making', through the formation of a series of backgrounds, whereby artists were commissioned to make the exhibition in situ, with their work(s) responding directly to particular surface-sites in the gallery space. In each case, the commissioned works originated from extant projects by the invited artists, with works being adapted according to specific space(s) within the Project Arts Centre. The exhibition was intentionally curated without an overarching, illustrative theme that would hold the individual works together as a cohesive whole. It was a series of contradictions and a play on visitor expectations of what constitutes a group exhibition – often understood as a grouping of related works. 'La La Land' operated beyond any theme or narrative, as a

unifying structuring device. The exhibition advocated a lack of cohesion, while establishing a visually-effective style, with commissioned works that linked through their response to specifically allocated surfaces within the gallery (fig. A2. 30).

For the floor, Liam Gillick was invited to make a version of *Discussion Island Preparation Zone* (an ongoing work since 1998). This piece involved the preparation of space for public exhibition, with the curator following strict instructions determined by the artist (fig. A2. 31). Accordingly, a mixture of vodka, water and glitter was used to wash down the floor of the exhibition space in expectation of the arrival of the viewing public for the opening. In this way, Gillick engages with what happens on the periphery of the main event and how display can affect our relationship with our surroundings. As Iwona Blazwick writes, his works:

> [E]ncourage an intuitive bodily perception of movement through navigation and of perception through looking not just ahead but above, below and from the corner of the eye. Gillick choreographs spaces to make our relation to them performative – they might equally frustrate with a cul-de-sac or beckon with a resting place, seduce with a colour or clue, or obscure with a barrier or reflection.[500]

Discussion Island Preparation Zone (2005) was nomadic, with the materials constituting it sticking to gallery visitors and moving with them through the space (fig. A2. 32). This resulted in traces of the work exiting the gallery every time a visitor carried glitter out with them on their footwear, clothing and anything else that came in contact with the materials. The exhibition was literally taken outside with them, beyond the membrane of the gallery space. For Gillick, this work evokes what he calls the 'middle ground' as an area of speculative environmental effects:

> I am interested in the middle ground of social and economic activity. These are the spaces in our socio-economic and psycho-sociological space that are somewhat ill-defined. These enormous gaps can only be described with difficulty, but they need some degree of analysis if their effects are to be understood...This zone was traditionally seen as problematic in relation to creating functional art. Whereas in the past many artists flirted with the central zone of administrative activity, I was more interested to look at some of its environmental effects.[501]

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[500] Blazwick, Iwona. 'Introduction', *Liam Gillick: The Wood Way*, (London, Whitechapel Art Gallery, 2002), p. 4.

[501] Gillick, Liam. Interview with the author, New York, 03/05/04, p. 33. See Appendix One: LG. See also *Liam Gillick*, Eds. Susanne Gaensheimer and Nicolaus Schafhausen (Cologne, Oktagon, 2000), p. 23.

Gillick's *Discussion Island Preparation Zone* created the spatial setting for exhibition viewing, in which the gallery visitor is put forward as the leading character in a staged scenario, with 'La la Land' as a space awaiting interpretation, in anticipation of the spectator (fig. A2. 33).[502]

Ronan McCrea's temporary street architecture *Appropriate Measures II* (1995-2005) was installed in the gallery (fig. A2. 34) to become the substrate for Jaime Gili's selection of artists' fly-posters. McCrea's 'social sculpture' was based on the generic wooden hoardings used to demarcate pedestrian walkways during the construction or re-development of a building at the side of an urban road. Posted directly onto McCrea's structure was *Tipos Móviles*, an exhibition of posters by artists selected, commissioned and curated by artist, Jaime Gili.[503] Gili invited artists to suggest a utopian piece of text which would be interpreted by a printer, working on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, using a wooden letterpress from 1904 (fig. A2. 35).[504] Originally intended for public space, like McCrea's hoarding, the posters were removed from their original outdoor context and brought into the gallery. From behind a doorway cut into McCrea's structure, Anthony Gross's animated film *Crowd Roar Ascending* – produced using 3D game software and digital props purchased from online communities – played as a virtualised, dystopian narrative (figs. A2. 36, 37). Like McCrea and Gili's contributions, this work also involved a process of appropriation from a space outside the work – in this case hyperspace – and the re-allocation of appropriated material into a newly-created context.

Lothar Götz's bright, geometric wall painting, occupying the two largest uninterrupted walls of the gallery space, mimicked the ambitious scale of public murals (fig. A2. 38). Taking as its visual focal point the corner of the gallery which confronted visitors as they entered the space, Götz specifically designed his painting to stretch from this corner, across the adjacent walls, to produce a visually dominant, playful effect. In doing so, he divided the gallery into two visibly distinct spaces, with his brightly painted installation on one side and the remaining white-walled space on the other. As Billy Leahy described this work:

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[502] See also Liam Gillick, Interview with the author, op. cit. pp. 23-25. See Appendix One: GI.

[503] See www.jaimegili.org/lalaland.html

[504] The artists were Kathrin Böhm, Neil Chapman, Simon Faithfull, Claire Goodwin, Mustafa Hulusi, Abigail Hunt, Inventory, Neil McIvor, Marta Marcé, Kieren Reed, Bob and Roberta Smith, Tomoko Takahashi, Mark Titchner, and Ana Laura López de la Torre.

> The most striking piece in the exhibition is Lothar Götz's hard-edged, geometric wall painting, which contains a bright colour-coding system developed directly as a response to the gallery's physical qualities. The pastels and bold colours beam down from two walls from the corner of the room, that works in a similar way to a 3-D painting, drawing us in and out of the apex of the space almost as if we were within the painting itself. (fig. A2. 39).[505]

On the only remaining white surface of the gallery, David Blamey hung one of his *Celestial Notice Boards* (2005) – a drawing made using assorted white-headed pins applied directly to an enlarged office notice board (fig. A2. 40). Blamey took display forms that originated outside the space of the gallery (in this case, the office environment) and used them as both the surface and materials for the drawings. Employing an assortment of pins, which he had collected from office suppliers around the world, the artist creates drawings that are evocative of a starry sky at night while emphasising the heterogeneity of the 'ordinary' map pin. Instead of using the pins in the standard way, to locate and highlight selective points on the world map, they are used to create their own representational universe.

Meanwhile, Kathrin Böhm turned the ceiling of the gallery into an area of free-form pattern and decoration, through the application of posters that behaved like a collage, scaled up to the proportions of the gallery, as part of her project *and millions and millions* (ongoing since 2001).[506] Böhm selected and enlarged prints from an enormous archive of recycled images to produce a fresco-like intervention that produced both pictorial and architectural transformations (fig. A2. 41).

By establishing the parameters and allotting spaces in which the artists would work, I re-activated the idea of the curator as a 'filter', a term first used to represent the design role played by artist Liam Gillick in Maria Lind's curated exhibition 'What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design' at Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2000).[507] All of the artworks in 'La La Land' were realised according to each artist's instructions, with the curator being required to provide time, materials, technical assistance, and the

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[505] See Leahy, Bill. 'No man's land', *Village*, 27 May-2 June, 2005, p. 59. For further information about Götz's ongoing wall-painting projects, see *Lothar Götz Paint*, Ed. Oliver Zybok (Wuppertal, Verlag der Galerie Epikur, 2000) and Schönenberg, Erik. *Lothar Götz Houses for Tollmi*, (Goch, Museum Goch, 2004).

[506] See www.theshowroom.org/go/art/media.bohm (assessed 21/06/04).

[507] See Lind, Maria. 'WHAT IF', *What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design*, Ed. Maria Lind (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 2000), (poster set in box, unpaginated).

correct conditions for the work to be completed on site. Through the provision of a specific site for each participant, some artists ended up with vastly disproportionate amounts of exhibiting space and, therefore, with more or less visible components within the overall exhibition layout. This meant that certain works dominated, such as Lothar Götz's two-walled painting, whereas other works had a more subtle presence, like Anthony Gross's film work which was hidden behind the work of Ronan McCrea. This non-democratic approach to the distribution of space was mirrored in Liam Gillick's description of his role as a 'filter' for Lind's exhibition:

> One of the main things that I did was to make the exhibition non-democratic in terms of space because there is usually an assumption, possibly quite correctly for historical reasons, that one should be somewhat democratic in terms of the distribution of space to artists within an institution and if not, only when it is entirely appropriate to what the work requires: a) You try to be equal and b) You try to be appropriate to the work.[508]

Gillick suggests that the 'filter' role was only made possible because he was not the main curator of the exhibition; having being given a filtering position, he could behave more as a disruptive artistic agent, thus relieving the main curator of the responsibility for placing the works. Gillick's acknowledged contribution was the exhibition design as an artwork, which also included his use of the lighting, layout and final placement of works.[509]

Maria Lind describes 'What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design' as experimenting with how to put together an exhibition, while questioning the communication processes and established structures of exchange within the cultural and academic sphere, but she denies that it was an exhibition merely with process as its main element. Indeed, 'What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design' addressed the link between art, architecture and design by employing the exhibition space as the site of production, where many of the artworks were brought together to create a specific physical environment. Works were used as utility objects, furniture, and to form a division of areas within the gallery set aside for discussion, events or just hanging out.[510] The artist, Pae White, was also invited to produce a multiple made up of other artists'

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[508] Liam Gillick, Interview with the author, op. cit. p. 9. See Appendix One: GI.

[509] Lind, Maria. 'WHAT IF', op cit. unpaginated.

[510] Ibid. unpaginated. See also Gillick, Liam. 'What If We Attempted to Address That Which Seems So Apparent?' in Lind, Maria. 'WHAT IF', *What If: Art on the Verge of Architecture and Design*, Ed. Maria Lind (Stockholm, Moderna Museet, 2000), (one of poster set in box, unpaginated).

works – a box set of A3 artists' posters that doubled up as the catalogue –which could be continually re-assembled according to how the user wished to organise the contents. While responsive to each artist's vested interest in the cross-disciplinary remit, Lind's tactic of inviting Gillick to provide a non-democratic, interruptive, spatial arrangement of other artists' work effectively distanced the curator from those tasks she would normally carry out. Gillick's intervention into the exhibition layout was to group the works of seventeen of the twenty-one artists into a tightly-packed geometric cluster within the gallery. Other works were also shown elsewhere, beyond the main exhibition building, or in a publication or as a programmed event, while Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's *Brasilia Hall* (1998-2000), and works by Jorge Pardo, Rita McBride and Martin Boyce took up three quarters of the space.[511]

During the installation period at Project Arts Centre, Dublin, 'La La Land' operated as a studio for the artists, with all of the works being produced on site and the exhibition becoming the site of production, as well as dissemination, for the works. I also wanted to draw attention to the hierarchical connotations of the curatorial act, but in a way in which artists would not be restricted by an overly-interpretative, didactic response to their works, with the curator as the 'grand designer' of the exhibition. Instead, the layout was determined by each artist's proposition for a restricted, imposed space, for which they had to adapt their work. The principal curatorial framework for 'La La Land' was centred around what I have referred to as background works, with these works operating as a formal backdrop to a series of workshops and discussions which took place in the gallery during the exhibition.

'La La Land' proposed a way of thinking about the exhibition as a series of fragments (artworks), which could not be described in its totality. Each work contributed to the installation as a whole. Each artist's intervention in the gallery represented a single site-responsive work which gathered meaning as a detail of a larger archive of other versions of ongoing work(s).[512] What survives after the staging of such an exhibition is a series of

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[511] Lind, Maria, Ibid. See also Farquharson, Alex. 'Curator and Artist', *Art Monthly*, 270, (October, 2003), pp. 13-16.

[512] In order to establish and evaluate what kind of potential archive the exhibition component of the project could produce, I invited two artist-curatorial groupings: Valley Vibes and B+B (Sophie Hope and Sarah Carrington) – whose work clearly engages with the gathering of documents as part of ongoing archival projects. Valley Vibes, conceived by Jeanne van Heeswijk in collaboration with Amy Plant, is an urban research project containing a mobile sound system, which was used by individuals and organisations in the Lea Valley area of London. Hundreds of hours of audio material generated by the users was collected over a period of four years. This Vibe Detecting service tool, with its simple design in gleaming aluminium, small enough to fit into a domestic doorway, appeared as a hybrid between a giant ghetto blaster and an ice cream trolley. It functioned simultaneously as a portable karaoke machine, a radio station and a conferencing set. Four trolley wheels ensured that it could travel through the streets to private parties, the local hairdressers, the market place, the

installation photographs, with traces of any multi-authored processes of production and display reduced to recorded documents. These images survive long after the period of production, as fragments of a curatorial process that resulted in an exhibition form. 'La La Land' proposed the group exhibition as a site of production for the artists involved, and as a staging device for the dialogue between different artistic positions. By emphasising the separateness of each artist's response to particular sites in the gallery, there was an intentional lack of unity between the works, and it was this lack of cohesion that was intended to highlight the basis of the curatorial structure.[513]

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night-club, the latest poetry reading, school events, official meetings and debates, local festivals or wherever it was desired. Inside the Vibe Detector was a sophisticated but user friendly complete professional sound kit – a popular resource for playing records, tapes and CDs and for mixing. A DAT recorder would automatically make a high-quality recording of the material being played through the equipment each time it was in action. In order for a broad local public to really benefit from the Detector, they offered people advice, publicity material and a technician for their events. The Vibe Detector was advertised through the host venues and other local channels. It was free of charge to people in the area for which it was designated. In order to obtain it for the night, day or weekend, people only had to make a booking and Plant and van Heeswijk were at their service. For four years, the Vibe Detector operated in the Lea Valley area (known as London Sector A: a large strip within East London, stretching from Greenwich in the South to the outskirts of Greater London in the North, this area is a designated site for regeneration by the European community). The Detector was used by individuals and groups to stage events in public and private spaces, with entertainment a deliberately integral part of the project. Not only could people's creative expression be celebrated through the events they staged themselves, but the entertainment factor also played a crucial role in mobilising a demand for the Detector. By the end of its journey, the Detector had collected many aural documents, ranging from discussions and storytelling to musical recordings, originating from a range of personal tastes and social situations. As part of 'La La Land', Plant and van Heeswijk were resident in the exhibition space, utilising the time of the exhibition to distil their archival material and talk to visitors about their project. This process will eventually be used to create a web archive, comprised of a sampled audio hybrid and a logbook of where the Detector travelled and who used it. As a further method of mediating and debating the role of the archive in the context of artistic practice, a discussion, hosted by B+B with Plant and van Heeswijk, was held in the gallery. This day-long event presented documentation of other collaborative artistic practices and focused on the issue of documenting collaborative and archival processes within contemporary art practice. The open public forum responded to the following key questions: How is a multi-authored process transformed through documentation? How can documentation enliven the endings of a project rather than signal its demise? What would a collective document look like? Who do we document for?

[513] I am indebted to both Anna Harding and Stuart Hall's respective propositions for open and expanding archival practices, which are opposed to their own completion. Harding proposes a 'potential ongoing archive' as a means of de-institutionalising the archive through a continued activation of subjective organisational systems. Such an approach highlights its own production, through the continued process of creative production which takes on the multiple forms of an archive. Hall argues for a 'living archive' that is at once present, unfinished, open-ended and continually in a state of being that is amid its own production. See *Potential Ongoing Archive*, Ed. Anna Harding (Amsterdam: Artimo, 2002) and Hall, Stuart. 'Constituting an Archive', *Third Text*, 54. (Spring, 2001), pp. 89-93.

4. 'General Idea/Selected Retrospective': The Historical Survey Exhibition

Jim Drobnick has pointed out that any potential lineage of unconventional curatorial strategies, operating counter to museum conventions and historical exhibition paradigms, is often traced back to conceptual art of the 1960s, but frequently omits the period of engaged curatorial practice that took place between the late 1960s and 1990s, in particular the developments within artistic practice that used curating as a medium during the 1980s.[514] As very few artists working curatorially have remained active throughout this entire period, in order to provide an historical link between early curatorial innovations (linked to conceptual art) and the curator's 'moment' of the 1990s, I focused on the work of General Idea from the late 1960s through to the 1990s.[515] This became a vehicle through which to explore the impact of artist-curator models upon emergent forms of collective curatorial practice since the 1990s.

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[514] See Jim Drobnick's introduction to his interview with Doug Ashford, Julie Ault, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and members of Group Material in Drobnick, Jim. 'Dialectical Group Materialism', *AIDS Riot: Artist Collectives Against AIDS, New York 1987-1994*, Eds. 12th Session of the École du Magasin (Grenoble, Le Magasin, 2003), p. 281.

[515] As well as working closely with archivist Fern Bayer, who is in charge of the General Idea archive at the National Gallery of Ontario, part of my initial research for this project took account of the following General Idea publications – which, unless otherwise stated, were edited and published by General Idea: *General Idea: Editions 1967-1995*, Fisher, Barbara, Ed. (Mississauga, Blackwood Gallery, 2003); *General Idea*, Decter, Joshua, et al, Eds. (London, Camden Arts Centre, 1998); *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975*, Bayer, Fern. Ed. (Toronto, Art Gallery of Ontario, 1997); *General Idea*, Decter, Joshua, et al, Eds. (Chicago, Arts Club of Chicago, 1997); *General Idea. Die Kanadische Künstlergruppe*, Trescher, Stephan, Ed. (Nürnberg, Verlag für moderne Kunst, 1996); *General Idea: Multiples - Catalogue Raisonné, Multiples and Prints 1967-1993*, (Toronto: S.L. Simpson Gallery, 1993); *General Idea: El Dorado (Maracaibo)*,(Madrid, Galeria Fucares, 1992); *General Idea's PHARMA©OPIA*, (Barcelona, Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, 1992); *General Idea's Fin de Siècle*, (Hamburg, Stuttgart and Toronto, Hamburg Kunstverein, Kunstverein Stuttgart and The Power Plant, 1992); *General Idea: The AIDS Project*, Schwartzman, Allan, Ed. (Toronto, Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, 1989); *General Idea: The Armoury of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion*, (Tokyo, Setagaya Art Museum, 1987); *General Idea: The Armoury of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion*, (Buffalo, Albright-Knox Gallery, 1986); *General Idea's 1984* (a *FILE* issue, Vol. 6, Nos. 1 & 2, 1984, Birnie.Danzker, Jo-Anne and General Idea, Eds. (Vancouver and Toronto, Vancouver Art Gallery and Art Official Inc., 1984); *General Idea 1968-1984*, (Eindhoven: Stedelijk van Abbemuseum, 1984); *XXX Voto (to the Spirit of Miss General Idea)*, (Montreal, Galerie René Blouin, Montreal and Toronto, S. L. Simpson Gallery, 1995); *The Sequel: Shut the Fuck Up*, (Basel, Stampa Galerie, 1992); *General Idea: The AIDS Project*, (Toronto, The Gershon Iskowitz Foundation, 1992); *FILE Megazine: Final Issue*, No. 29, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., 1989); *AIDS: The Public and Private Domains of the Miss General Idea Pavilion*, (San Franscisco, Artspace, 1988); *Test Pattern: TV Dinner Plates from the Miss General Idea Pavilion*, (Tokyo, SPIRAL, Wacoal Art Center, 1988); *FILE Megazine: The Journal of the New Mortality*, #27, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Spring 1987); *FILE Megazine: The Journal of the New Art Market*, No. 28, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., 1987); *FILE Megazine: Sex, Drugs, Rock 'n' Roll*, No. 25, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., 1986); *FILE Megazine: Diane Frankenstein*, Vol. 6, No. 3, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., 1985); *FILE Megazine: General Idea's 1984 and the 1968-1984 FILE Retrospective*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, (Toronto, Art Official Inc.,1984); *FILE Megazine: Mondo Cane Kama Sutra*, Vol. 5, No. 4, (Toronto, Art Official Inc.,1983); *FILE Megazine: X Ray Sex*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Spring, 1982); *FILE Megazine: Special $$ Issue*, Vol. 5 No. 1, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., March 1981); *FILE Megazine: The Rematerialization of the Art Object*, Vol. 5, No. 2, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Fall, 1981); *FILE Megazine: Special Global Downtown Issue*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Summer, 1980); FILE *Megazine: Foreign Agents*, Vol. 4, No. 4, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Fall, 1980); *FILE Megazine: Special Transgressions Issue*,Vol. 4, No. 2, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Fall, 1979); *General Idea: Ménage à Trois*, (Toronto, Art Metropole, Toronto, 1979); *FILE Megazine: 1984: A Year in Pictures*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Summer, 1978); *FILE Megazine: Special People Issue*, Vol.3, No. 3, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Spring, 1977); *FILE Megazine: Punk Rock Issue*, Vol. 3, No. 4, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Fall, 1977); *FILE Megazine: New York City Edition*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Spring, 1976); *General Idea: Search for the Spirit*, (Geneva, Galerie Gaetan, 1976); *FILE Megazine: Glamour Issue*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., Autumn, 1975); *FILE Megazine: Annual Artists' Directory*, Vol. 2, No. 5, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., February, 1974); *Luxon V.B.: The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion* (Toronto, General Idea, 1973); *FILE Megazine: Special Double Issue*, Vol. 2, No. 1/2, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., May, 1973);

In recognition of the artist-curator phenomenon, I began to look at how certain artists such as General Idea were already using curatorial mechanisms as a means of contesting the formal conventions of the exhibition, with the group exhibition put forward as a means of self-organisation as well as a primary medium in a hybridised form of artistic practice. General Idea's interest in their group identity 'as parasites led [them] to establish [their] own universe of an art world within [their] artmaking.'[516] As one of its member artists, AA Bronson, stated:

> [W]e were at once theoreticians, critics, artists, curators and bureaucrats, the penultimate shape-shifters. The metastructure of our artmaking included not only the studio, the artist and the artwork but also the museum, the archive, the gallery shop and event the mass media... as a sort of armour or carapace we wore for invading the artworld.[517]

Artists' groups such as Group Material and General Idea were central to establishing the idea that exhibitions are as much about *how* art is seen as about *which* art is seen, and that artists who consider the spaces in which their work is displayed, as part of their strategic remit, are already curating from within their own practice. General Idea's multifarious approaches to mediation, distribution and collaboration – which included the publishing of other artists' projects alongside their own in their self-published magazine *FILE Megazine* (since 1972) and the establishment of a distribution centre and exhibition space for artists' editions and multiples – extended the parameters of curatorial work beyond the gallery space into multiple channels of dissemination. General Idea presented such activity as an ongoing artwork involving other artists when they set up *Art Metropole* in Toronto (1974) as an exhibition space with the purpose of showing and publishing artists' editions. In recognition of the significance of General Idea in blurring the boundaries between the roles of artist and curator, I co-curated (with Grant Watson) an historical survey at Project Gallery, Dublin, in 2006. The resulting exhibition, 'General Idea: Selective Retrospective' attempted to develop a collaborative model, working alongside another curator, with a view to reconsidering the historical

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FILE Megazine: IFEL Issue, Vol. 2, No. 3, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., September, 1973); *FILE Megazine: Mondo Nudo Issue*, Vol. 2, No. 4, December, 1973); *FILE Megazine* Vol. 1, No. 1, 15 April, 1972); *FILE Megazine* Vol. 1, No. 2/3, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., May/June, 1972); *FILE Megazine* Vol. 1, No. 4, (Toronto, Art Official Inc., December, 1972); *Manipulating the Self*, (Toronto, Coach House Press, 1971).

[516] Bronson, AA. 'Myth as Parasite/Image as Virus: General Idea's bookshelf 1967-1975', *The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975*, Ed. Fern Bayer (Toronto, The Gallery of Ontario, 1997), p. 19.

[517] Ibid. pp. 19-20.

survey exhibition in the context of the artists' group General Idea (1969-1994).[518] As established with the previous exhibitions 'Coalesce', 'TONIGHT' and 'La La Land', the organisation of the exhibition material was again divided into background, middle-ground and foreground work. Each area of the exhibition was considered and worked upon separately, but in the context of the whole. By working closely with Watson and surviving General Idea artist AA Bronson on all aspects of the exhibition, the curatorial process attempted to mimic the three-way collective methodology originally established by the three artists making up General Idea.

(i) The Background: AIDS Wallpaper Remade

In the late1980s, General Idea responded to the AIDS epidemic by focusing their practice on the semiotic and social implications of the disease, married to a form of political activism. A classic work from this period was their appropriation and transgressive adaptation of Robert Indiana's famous LOVE emblem into the AIDS acronym. This AIDS logo formed the basis for a large body of work by General Idea, which utilised both the gallery and the public domain to widely distribute mass-produced material such as posters, billboards, lottery tickets, stamps and electronic images (fig. A2. 42). Perhaps their best-known project from this period, the screen-printed *AIDS Wallpaper* (1989-2006), was installed from floor to ceiling in the Project Arts Centre, creating a formal background to the presentation of material sourced from AA Bronson's personal archives and the General Idea Archive, held at the Museum of Ontario, Toronto. This material was laid out chronologically, in display cabinets designed by artist Anthony Gross (with whom I had collaborated on 'TONIGHT') in consultation with AA Bronson (fig. A2. 43).[519] The gallery space was completely covered with wallpaper, with the repeated logo intentionally multiplied through its infinite reflection on the glass surfaces of display cases containing archive material. So, while the *AIDS*

[518] Established by Michael Tims (a.k.a. AA Bronson), Ron Gabe (a.k.a. Felix Partz) and Jorge Saia (a.k.a. Jorge Zontal).

[519] Early on in my research, I interviewed Bronson about the relevance of curating to the practice of General Idea since the late 1960s, and it following this initial contact that we began to discuss together the possibility of a future exhibition project that would form part of my PhD submission. See Bronson, AA. Interview with the author, New York, 28/05/04. See Appendix One: BR. This interview was edited continually by Bronson during our correspondence via email throughout 2005-06 and has been subsequently published in *North Drive Press*, No. 3, Eds. Matt Keegan and Sara Greenberger Rafferty (New York, June, 2006), unpaginated.

Wallpaper performed as a backdrop to the archival material, it also visually infected the reading of the foregrounded material through its prominance (fig. A2. 44).[520]

General Idea was interested in employing viral methods via mainstream distribution channels such as television and communication forms of mass media specific to the cultural world. This interest in the virus as a counter-cultural strategy pre-dated the AIDS epidemic of the 1980s and General Idea's response to it. As an outlet for mediating and promoting their ideas and collaborations with other artists in print form, *FILE Megazine* (1972-89) aped the format of *Life* magazine, but it was in their reconfiguration of the ubiquitous Indiana LOVE logo and their over-saturation of the AIDS logo that the virus leitmotif became most overt.[521] As AA Bronson wrote in the catalogue for the exhibition 'The Search for the Spirit: General Idea 1968-1975' in 1997:

> We considered ourselves a cultural parasite and our method was viral... We realised that the structure and surplus of our society was such that we could live, like parasites, on the body of our host, off the excess... we could infect the mainstream with our mutations, and stretch that social fabric... In the late 1980s, when the word virus came to have a more literal intervention in our lives, when HIV opened the door to a host of viral infections in Jorge's and Felix's bodies, we revised these methods to suit the times: we injected our image of our AIDS logo into the lifeblood of the communication, advertising and transportation systems – as billboards, electronic signs, posters, magazine covers, even a screen saver – to spread, virus-like through the public realm.[522]

AIDS Wallpaper not only surrounded the visitor to Project whilst enveloping the gallery and exhibition contents, it also provided one of the decade-makers in the show. The exhibition-production process involved the re-making of one key work from the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s by General Idea. There was an intention to introduce a timeline running through the exhibition, from the earliest material from the 1970s to the final work realised by General Idea in 1994, with *AIDS Wallpaper* as one of four works remade for

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[520] The flattened-out and unifying reflection of the AIDS logo across the surfaces of the display cases was, paradoxically, made more active by the use of non-reflective glass, used to stem the reaction of light upon the archival material and intended to reduce the impact of glare upon the experience of archive-viewing.

[521] For a retrospective of *File Megazine* between 1968-1984, see *FILE Megazine (General Idea's 1984 and the 1968-1984 FILE Retrospective)*, Vol. 6, No. 1/2, (1984).

[522] Bronson, AA. op. cit. p. 17 and p. 22. For a more in-depth look at General Idea's AIDS logo project and its relationship with AIDS and art activism in New York in the 1980s, see AA Bronson's interview with the curatorial students from the 12th Session of the École du Magasin in Grenoble, published as part of a wider survey of collective responses originating from contemporary art to the AIDS epidemic in New York between 1987-1994 in Le Magasin, op. cit.

the exhibition. Along with *Mondo Cane Karma Sutra* (1983-2006)[523] – a remade A0 pop-graphic print of the trio as fornicating poodles – mail art from 1983, sent out from the gallery, represented the 1980s period of General Idea's output; these two works bracketing the AIDS-related work (fig. A2. 45).

(ii) The Middle-ground: Displaying the Archive

Archival material – documenting the group's early works from the 1970s – was central to the exhibition, with the central display system as the most dominant spatial aspect. Like the structure Gross designed for 'TONIGHT', this display structure operated as a curatorial device that provided certain viewing conditions for the material and enabled a particular slowing-down of the viewing experience (fig. A2. 46). As artist-curator Gavin Wade describes, exhibition design operates as a curatorial tool:

> [E]xhibition design is a tool of curatorial practice which can exist as a separate thing that you use but the only time it's part of the same impulse is when it's imagined right from the start, i.e. when the exhibition design is part of the curatorial strategy or is part of the environment to speculate, that you can make an environment, knowing that that environment is going to affect artists or visitors or whoever else in a certain way, you want it to control the situation in a certain way.[524]

The brilliant white display cases were designed to function as a minimal display system that would not deflect from the visual dynamics of the background (fig. A2. 47). The eight free-standing display units could be laid out in the space and pushed together to form pathways through the exhibition. By joining the units, the resulting form dictated two main visitor routes through the gallery space – one on the outside of the units and one on the inside. Individually, they were designed according to the rough dimensions of a human coffin, conferring a potentially macabre reading onto the archive material as being firmly situated in a distant historical moment, indicating a relationship between the archive as dead material and the untimely demise of General Idea as a collective practice in 1994 following the deaths of Partz and Zontal.

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[523] See General Idea's special issue about this work: *1983 FILE Megazine (Mondo Cane Kama Sutra)*, op. cit.

[524] Wade, Gavin. Interview with the author, London, 02/06/05, p. 8. See Appendix One: WA

(iii) The Foreground: Works Remade

Carefully-selected pieces from General Idea's oeuvre were displayed in the gallery and foyer, on the poster site outside the building and distributed as mail art. Remakes of works from different decades were positioned in relation to a selection of video works, texts, photographs and archival material which charted the development of the group's practice during the period 1968-1978. The remade works and the archive material operated as the foreground to the exhibition, providing historical markers within the chronological development of their practice as documented in the archival material.

For example, beginning with the outside of the gallery, the minimal and elegant *Luxon V.B* (1973-2006) was reconstructed for the first time since 1973 and installed according to the specific dimensions of the window at the entrance of the building (fig. A2. 48). As Tom Morton wrote, this work was key to establishing an inflected view of time in the context of the retrospective exhibition model:

> Curatorial selections could be interpreted as a full stop, but the exhibition... preferred to conclude on a note of suspense. In Project's window hung *Luxon V.B* (1973-2006), a Bronson-supervised remake of a venetian blind originally designed for the pavilion whose mirrored slats worked like a periscope, drawing a reflected image of the outside world into the gallery's foyer. If this was a retrospective, it was one that was inflected – as perhaps all retrospectives should be – by fragments of present-day life.[525]

Through its double-reflective surface, *Luxon V.B* brought the outside into the gallery space and reflected the viewer's image back into the gallery space. Through the alternate mirrored slats and the spaces between them, passers-by could see themselves superimposed on a bi-optical view of the exhibition inside and the street outside. This piece was installed adjacent to AA Bronson's first independent work to be made since the death of his artist-collaborators Partz and Zontal in 1994. *Felix, June, 1994* (1995-2006) was the final collaborative work that General Idea discussed together as a group; a large public billboard depicting an image of Felix Partz laid out in his bed, eyes wide open, his skeletal face looking down from a height up above. Surrounded by his most beloved possessions, he is wrapped in multi-coloured bed clothes, his head resting on a bright yellow pillow (fig. A2. 49).His favourite shirt is buttoned right up, covering the body, emaciated by the illnesses that has brought about his demise. It is a beautiful yet

[525] Morton, Tom. 'General Idea', *frieze*, 100, (June/July/August, 2006), p. 258. For other reviews of the exhibition at Project that appeared in the art press, see Beech, Dave. 'General Idea/Selected Retrospective', *Untitled*, 38, (Summer, 2006), p. 51. Stott, Tim. 'General Idea', *CIRCA*, 116, (January/February/March, 2006), pp. 70-72.

unsentimental picture of death. This colourful image, taken by Bronson in the hours immediately following Partz's death, represents the emotive end of General Idea while marking the beginning of Bronson's career as a solo artist.[526] Both *Luxon V.B* and *Felix, June 5, 1994* cast the historical past into the present moment.

As a 'selective retrospective', the exhibition attempted to subvert the viewer's relationship with the past and underline how historicisation of artistic practice is produced through certain subjective formulations in the context of art history. By re-making key works and positioning them in relation to archival material that documented the temporal trajectory of General Idea's own play with the future – such as *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion* project, which in itself only existed as a utopian construct for a future time that never occurred – the curatorial intention was to show the fragility of representing history in a coherent way, thereby emphasising the selective nature of retrospective exhibitions.[527]

The archive began with documentation of *What Happened* (1970),[528] the group's free-flowing interpretation of Gertrude Stein's play, which gave rise to the infamous *Miss*

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[526] See O'Neill, Paul. 'Group Practice.' *Art Monthly*, No. 304, (March, 2007), pp. 7-10, where I have discussed this work in greater detail and how it 'acts as an emotive signifier for all group work' and as a symbolic representation for collective alternatives to individual creative production. Ibid. p. 10. For three recent examinations of collective forms of self-organised, artist-curatorial practice, see *Collectivism After Modernity: The Art of Social Imagination After 1945*, Eds. Blake Stimson and Gregory Sholette (London and Minneapolis, University of Minnesota, 2007); *Collective Creativity*, Eds. René Block and Angelika Nollert (Frankfurt am Main, Revolver, 2005), and *Self-Organisation/ Counter-Economic Strategies*, Eds. Will Bradley, Mika Hannula, Cristina Ricupero and Superflex (Berlin and New York, Sternberg Press, 2006).

[527] See Ammann, Jean-Christophe. 'The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion', *General Idea Editions 1967-1995*, Ed. Barbara Fischer (Mississauga, Toronto, Blackwood Gallery, 2003) pp. 263-265 and Bayer, Fern, op. cit. pp. 94-114. See also Decter, Joshua. 'The Theatrics of Dissemination: A General Idea Model.' *General Idea's Fin de Siècle*, Ed. General Idea (Stuttgart, Hamburg and Toronto, Kunstverein Stuttgart, Kunstverein Hamburg and Power Plant, 1992), pp. 15-25; *General Idea's PHARMA©OPIA*, Ed. General Idea (Barcelona, Centre d'Art Santa Mònica, September 1992) and *General Idea: The Armoury of the 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion*, Ed. General Idea (Buffalo, Albright-Knox Gallery, 1986).

[528] *What Happened* (1970) was a multimedia event organised for the international Festival of Underground Theatre (FUT) held at St. Lawrence Centre for the Arts and the Global Village Theatre, Toronto from 19 August to 6 September, 1970. Based on Gertrude Stein's 1930s text that never actually states what happened, the performers for General Idea's event were the audience themselves, who were also asked to record the event and would become the main focus of these recordings. Divided into five acts and four intermissions, spread over a three-week period, seven performers were given equipment by General Idea: tape recorders, Polaroid cameras, video recorders, sketch books, and so on. The performers were requested to record certain events meticulously alongside the effects of their presence within them, with the event and the recording of it seen as interchangeable. General Idea proclaimed the success of the project was based on 'how well these interface situations erase the memory of the performance and the memory of what happened may be better than the amnesia of what is happening' (See General Idea cited in Bayer, Fern. op. cit. p. 45). During intermissions, the data gathered during the previous acts was played back, while other events took place. Ordinary occurrences – such as AA Bronson's demonstration of the unbuttoning and unfolding of his underpants, Jeff Levy having breakfast, Bernice Hune at her front door etc. – were displayed inside and outside the theatre space during the project. People entering the performance were rubber stamped with the name 'Gertrude Stein' and video equipment was available for visitors to record the event or take part in self-interviews, a Telex machine was also in the space, constantly sending Stein's text in full to the Toronto Stock Exchange and to the Canada Meat Packing company in Toronto. The staging of the first *Miss General Idea Beauty Pageant* also took place in the final stages of the project,

General Idea Beauty Pageants (performed in various ways between 1970 and 1978), a series of performance events that General Idea organised, for which they utilised the stock components of beauty contests: contestants, judges, talent contests, audiences and award ceremonies (figs. A2. 50, 51).[529] The *Miss General Idea Pageants* were employed by the artists as 'the framework' that focused on a complex mythology centred on the search for the allegorical Miss General Idea, who would be revealed in 1984.[530] The archive display at Project ended with documentation of the fictional destruction of the Miss General Idea Pavilion, in a fire of unknown origin, in 1978. The *Miss General Idea Pavilion* was the focus of much of the group's activities between 1973 and 1977 and was described by them as 'a framework for ideas'.[531] The pavilion was to be constructed especially for the 1984 *Miss General Idea Pageant*, which was to include 1,984 seats for the audience. Many of the works General Idea made during this period – such as *Going Thru the Motions* (1975), a rehearsal for the 1984 pageant, and *Going Thru the Notions* (1975), an exhibition at Carmen Lamanna Gallery, Toronto which consisted of many of the plans for the pavilion, such as the *Hoarding for the Miss General Idea Pavilion* (1975), which was placed on the pavement in front of the window of the gallery and blueprints for the proposed seating arrangements for the pavilion, architectural plans, photographs and documentation of previous pageants and realised installations such as *Luxon V.B* (1973) – took the pavilion as their subject matter. (figs. A2. 52, 53, 54)

Also on display in the archive at Project was a complete set of *FILE Megazine* (1972-89) (fig. A2. 55),[532] and a selection of early video works – *Pilot* (1977), *Hot Property* (1978/80) and *Shut The Fuck Up* (1985) – was also screened on a single monitor in the gallery with three seats and sets of headphones arranged for visitors. In the foyer of Project, unseen footage from *Luxon Video* (1973/74) was shown next to the installation

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with the artist Miss Honey receiving a prize for displaying her skills at the Telex machine, which was recorded as the conclusion of *What Happened*. For a detailed description of the project see Bayer, Fern. op. cit. pp. 44-46.

[529] Ibid. pp. 46-47.

[530] Ibid. p. 12. General Idea's ideas were formalised in a series of index cards called *Showcard Series* (1975-79), in which the group articulated five categories or 'framing devices.' 1) The Search for the Spirit of Miss General Idea (as a metaphor for the artist's search for an idea), 2) The 1984 Miss General Idea Pageants (as a metaphor for the process of creation, manipulation, production, selection and presentation of the work of art; as a framework for the artist-as-mythmaker and for the artist discovering his/her place in the world), 3) Miss General Idea 1984 (metaphor for the work of art, the idea itself, the artist's muse), 4) The Miss General Idea Pavilion (as a metaphor for the museum or art gallery, the container of the idea) and 5) The Frame of Reference (as a metaphor for the audience, the mass media, the limits of recognition). See also, General Idea, '1984: A Year in Pictures', *FILE Megazine*, vol. 4, no.1, (summer, 1978).

[531] Ibid. p. 94.

[532] See Diederichsen, Dietrich. 'An Alternative to the Alternative Press', *General Idea Editions 1967-1995*, Fischer, Barbara. op. cit. pp. 279-282.

of *Luxon V.B.* These video works, originally made for television, showed documentary-style footage covering the period of the production and destruction of *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion.* For example, *Hot Property* (1978/80) was set in the future in the ruins of the pavilion in 1984, purporting to show the preparation of a pageant for the opening of the pavilion, followed by documentation of the pavilion's destruction and its aftermath. This was just one of the many works that General Idea created as part of a whole series of performances, drawings, maps, installations, proposals and published works centred on the future construction and cultural mythologising of the Miss General Idea Pavilion, which was planned for 1984. This mythical building project as semi-fictional museum – never actually intended to be realised – formed the framework of much of General Idea's output during this period and was the central organising structure for which their work was made. At the core of their work from this time was the production of a future narrative that attempted to manufacture an expectant moment at which the pavilion would be available as an ideal museum-space to house all their work. But the pavilion only operated as a conceptual myth-making devise through which a certain process of art production could take place. As Tom Morton has written:

> *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion* is a project that's about the uneasy relationship art has to time and to (art) history, about what form an artistic practice's spine might take and in which direction it might grow. Shown now, 12 years after the AIDS-related deaths of Partz and Zontal... its savvy Conceptualism and playful humour have become flecked with heartbreak – the resurrecting "mystery" promised by the voice-over will never now take place.[533]

Continuing this conflated play with time, there was a selection of General Idea multiples and publications from *Art Metropole* for display and sale in the foyer space of the gallery. *Art Metropole* remains General Idea's only ongoing and evolving artwork. It was set up in 1974 as a not-for-profit exhibition space and distribution centre for the publishing and distribution of artists' editions, and remains active today. *Art Metropole* is both an artwork and a cultural institution with an exhibiting space in Toronto. The decision to invite Art Metropole to display elements from their archive and to sell their publications at Project in Dublin signalled the inclusion of an institution/gallery within an institution/gallery, within the context of an exhibition. *Art Metropole* was displayed as an artwork – as intended by General Idea – and as an art shop, exhibited within the framework of a public exhibition space beyond its Toronto home. With General Idea's

[533] Ibid. p. 258.

multiples and editions available for sale in Dublin, there was a transposition of location, as well as time, within the exhibition's content.

The exhibition demonstrated how the organising principles of the background, middle-ground, and foreground could also function as a formal structuring device for a specific historical survey exhibition. As with 'TONIGHT', 'La La Land' and 'Coalesce', it was important that the curatorial structure placed upon 'General Idea: Selective Retrospective' was responsive to attributes already inherent to the carefully selected works. The exhibition also made evident how these formal organising principles, set out beforehand, could make apparent certain codes and languages of display that were integral to the work of General Idea and that prescribed particular modalities of viewering. By working closely within a curatorial collective (that included a co-curator, Grant Watson, and the artist-as-producer, AA Bronson), a greater understanding of these attributes could effectively be brought to the fore without restricting the inherent qualities of the exhibited material in any way or disabling either the curatorial structure or the work of the artists.

5. Conclusion: Part Two

As important as it was to maintain a consistent curatorial methodology across the four exhibition platforms, it was also crucial to extend the potentiality of this vocabulary while testing its limitations. Each of the four exhibitions was used as a research tool in exploring the potential of the group exhibition as a space of collective co-production, in which curatorial and artistic work could operate in unison, with equal parts to play in the resulting exhibition. As research tools with practical outcomes, these projects were used to question the different ways in which the language of an exhibition is arrived at through a co-production process, working closely with artists within an open, yet predetermined, curatorial structure. Each exhibition attempted something unique, while adhering to an overarching curatorial framework set out beforehand. These four exhibitions can be read as separate and discrete outcomes, or parts of a more cohesive investigation into the group exhibition as a space of experimentation. They are four particular responses to the question of what mode(s) of authorship is/are being represented through the production of the group exhibition. By setting out to identify the *foreground, middle-ground,* and *background* material for each exhibition, I was able to demonstrate how the production of an exhibition could be structured around three separate, but interdependent, stages in which the group exhibition as a medium could be divided into three categories of organisation regardless of what was contained therein. My intention was not to inaugurate or consolidate the curating of group exhibitions as a discipline; instead it was to define a curatorial strategy from the outset, across four different exhibition projects, as a means of demonstrating how such a methodology could be usefully applied to the production of group exhibitions. This strategy demonstrated how curating can bring about a certain order to the exhibition material through the configuration of the architectural setting, the exhibition design, form, style and artistic content. These four projects were made possible by an intense period of curatorial research, as outlined in my main dissertation, and are intended to reflect upon how this body of research could be developed alongside more practical outcomes. By focusing on an overarching organisational structure it was my intention to show how each individual curatorial statement, made manifest in these exhibitions, was the result of divergent, complex, and dialectical relations between the curator and the artist as co-producers. By making these inter-relations apparent from the outset, 'the difference between collaborative and authorial structures'[534] converge during a process of co-production, leading to the construction of co-operative and co-authored group exhibition-formations.

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[534] In his keynote address for the Banff 2000 International Curatorial Summit at the Banff Centre, 24 August, 2000, Bruce Ferguson highlighted three recurring issues in contemporary curating, the third of which was 'the difference between collaborative and authorial structures.' See Townsend, Melanie. 'The Troubles With Curating', *Beyond the Box: Diverging Curatorial Practices*, Ed. Melanie Townsend (Banff, Canada, Banff Centre Press, 2003), p. xv.

APPENDIX TWO: Power point Presentation: CDR with Illustrations of Exhibitions

(Contained in Folder at the Back of this Bound Volume Illustrating Part Two of This Thesis)

CONCLUSION

To study developments within curatorial practice is to study the ways in which art has been displayed, mediated and discussed as part of our histories of exhibition-making. To write about curatorial practice is to think about how the exhibition of art has become part of a developmental process, of conceptualising ways in which art is understood. To analyse how these presentations are initiated and organised is to think about how art is framed, by selection procedures and systems of display, put forward by all those involved in the production of art, its meaning and its value, as expressed through these exhibitions. I have argued here that there is sufficient evidence to consider curating as a distinct practice of mediation which, since the late 1960s, has offered a growing contestation and critique of artistic autonomy. During this time, curators, artist-curators and curatorial collectives have continued to play a vital role in reconfiguring our understanding of the multiple agencies at work within the field of contemporary art.Initially attracted to this area of study by the apparent contradiction between the increasing visibility of the figure of the curator within art discourses over the past twenty years and the considerable gaps in curatorial knowledge within such discourses over the same period,[535] I have attempted to fill these gaps by conducting interviews with curators active during this period.[536] In spite of the volume of interviews undertaken – submitted as Appendix One, which formed the basis of my primary research – they represent only one aspect of the multiplicity of accounts and articulations that have formulated and organised a specific mode of discourse on contemporary curatorship. But what these interviews – and my analysis of them alongside the literature review undertaken in the main body of text – make apparent is the contextual relationship of interview subjects to emergent and dominant discourses around curatorial practice since

[535] See, for example, curator Annie Fletcher's comments in Fletcher, Annie. Interview with the author. Amsterdam, 20/09/05. Appendix One: FL. p. 9. In an interview about her career trajectory at a time when she was leading De Appel Curatorial Training Programme in Amsterdam, Fletcher not only acknowledged the lack of precedents for curatorial practice, but also disclosed the extent to which curatorial education was reliant on current trends. Fletcher states, 'I think I'm guilty as charged, basically, and I think it's a really interesting point to think about, I have actually gone through a curatorial training programme [at De Appel in 1996] and am now heading up one that's completely embedded in the present and, as far as it goes, it's probably only through artists' works from the sixties and seventies that I have any knowledge of exhibition and curating histories, because curatorial research is completely embedded in the present.'

[536] The interviewing method of gathering evidence also succeeded in mimicking the dominant mode of knowledge-production within the curatorial field, whereby the curator is given centre stage. The recorded interview was a useful format of gathering new information about each subjects's trajectory into the curatorial profession. The interview was intentionally used as a means of examining how each subject's position and their practice relates to the discursive curatorial field as a whole, with the aim of establishing a recent oral history of curatorial practice. Each interview functioned as a tool for gathering information about each curator, their precedents and their own exhibition-making histories. Once collated, this body of material not only provided a means of tracing a recent history, but also enabled a cross examination of responses to my key issues.

the late 1980s. This has particular resonance to the personal statement or self-presentational form which, predicated on a presumed interest in the individual creative subject, has become the established means of knowledge production within the curatorial field.[537]

What has become apparent throughout this research is how curatorial discourse – as a particular field of enquiry that engages directly with the activity of individual curators – has emerged in the last twenty years and continues to be motivated by an interest in the accompanying authority that enunciated discourse can bring to individual cultural practice. This dissertation has attempted to locate moments of conjuncture in the development of discussions centred on the figure of the curator as a creative individual. It has sought to articulate three key moments: the late 1960s, with the emergence of the first independent exhibition-makers, linked to conceptual art practices, which saw a demystification of the curatorial role; the late 1980s, with the emergence of the figure of the author-curator and a move towards a more global curatorial practice within an expanding culture industry along with the advent of new biennials; and the 1990s, with the convergence of artistic and curatorial practice leading to a 'super-visibility' for certain curators and the group exhibition becoming a conventional form of self-presentation, and of self-mediation within the social sub-system of the contemporary art world.

Chapter One demonstrated how the changing role of the curator in the late 1960s caused discussions around art and its exhibition context to be rethought in terms of the part played by curators in transforming how art was made and who was responsible for its mediation. Research showed how the late 1960s represented a key transitional moment in the demystification of the curatorial gesture, whereby the vital role of a few independent curators – such as Lucy Lippard, Seth Siegelaub and Harald Szeemann – began to be included in critical discussions as to what constituted the production and conceptualisation of art. Such perceptions marked a shift away from the understanding of art as an autonomous act of production, leading to the framing of art and ideas about art being determined as a form of expanding artistic practice. During this time, curatorial practice emerged as a creative act of mediation, which structures the expression and the experience of the work of art, and which affects the ways in which art is made,

[537] See Foucault's definition of 'statement' in Foucault, Michel, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (London and New York, Routledge, 2003, originally published in English in 1972), p. 90. See also pp. 90-131.

communicated and disseminated to an audience. The idea of the 'curated' exhibition was eventually established as an entity for critical reflection in its own right, with the figure of the individual curator at the centre of these debates. By the 1980s, the increased visibility of the role of the curator as *auteur* of the group exhibition form, when there was a return to curatorial processes of selecting and working with discrete objects, enabled a re-mystification of the figure of the curator. Curators themselves, such as Harald Szeemann, Rudi Fuchs and Jan Höet, articulated the role of the curator as one which was actively responsible for the shaping of meanings in art through exhibition-making as a subjective form of authorship with the exhibition proffered as a curatorial text analogous to a total work of art. The appearance by the late 1980s of the verb 'to curate' began to articulate 'curating' as a mode of active participation in the processes of artistic production, with the curated exhibition providing a distinct style and method of self-presentation and curators constructing subjective 'new truths' about art, often presented as universal narratives within an overarching curatorial frame. By the time curatorial anthologies began to appear, in parallel with the emergence of curatorial training programmes in the 1990s, curating had entered a stage of institutionalisation of the function of the curator within artistic practice whereby a history of exhibition-makers began to evolve as a means of filling major gaps in curatorial knowledge. Research has also shown that there was an emergence and consolidation of a new discourse on art exhibitions, specific to the field of contemporary art curating, which continued to support a more central and powerful position for the figure of the individual curator within art discourses as a whole. The rhetoric of amnesia became a dominant trope in the crusade for increased curatorial knowledge, predominantly led by a generation of curators to emerge in the 1990s in an attempt to understand their own practice in relation to the past.

In Chapter Two, an exploration of a 'new genre of exhibition' – which, beginning with 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in 1989, sought to gather together different parts of the world in one exhibition – showed how an expanded role for internationally-mobile, globally-networked curators took place within the art world. Since 1989, the number of large-scale global exhibitions has continued to increase, with internationalism being taken up as both the main objective and dominant theme. A parallel critique of these developments – through the interviews undertaken with some of the leading biennial curators of this period such as Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Catherine David, Okwui Enwezor, Charles Esche and Robert Storr – demonstrated the initial influence of

'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in broadening debate beyond the established Western centres of art. Later exhibitions, such as 'Trade Routes, History and Geography: 2nd Johannesburg Biennial' (1997), 'Documenta X' (1997) and 'Documenta11' (2002), moved away from the notion of cultural pluralism based on random differences and an ethnographic approach towards the 'other', while acknowledging the impossibility of representing a total world-view within a single exhibition. Instead, a post-colonial approach was encouraged, changing the position from which the artistic canon can be read, with non-Western centres of cultural production taken into account by curators. This investigation showed how curating in the context of biennials and large-scale international exhibitions contributed significantly to discussions around dialectics of margin and centre, globalism and globalisation, local and international, hybridity and fragmentation. Whereas literature responding to these developments has continued to configure an expanded role for these exhibitions, their curators have articulated the biennial model as one of the rare opportunities to make a substantial curatorial statement on the global art stage. With the rise of the global contemporary art world, there has been an increasingly dense exhibitions market of biennials and large-scale exhibitions, which have also embraced globalism as an adoptable model for reconfiguring the art world along with the role of the curator.

While the 'biennial phenomenon' has reflected the diversity of global artistic practice, perennial exhibitions have operated as display spaces for the legitimisation of art and curatorial praxis within the global culture industry. Research has also shown how they have become a form of valorising institution in themselves and, with only a small number of curators being given the responsibility to take on such large-scale projects, they have become ratifying devices for the upper echelons of the contemporary art world, for artists and curators alike. In response to such criticism, individual curators like Ute Meta Bauer, Francesco Bonami, Okwui Enwezor, Hans Ulrich Obrist and organisations such as the Manifesta Foundation have acknowledged the failure of the singly-authored exhibition to engage in more collective models of curating. This examination exposes how the limitations of the biennial exhibition model have been directly addressed by an expansion of the parameters of the exhibition to include discussions, publications and 'extraterritorialised' events beyond the single exhibition as a temporally- and spatially-defined event.

Chapter Three considered how the 1990s represented a moment of convergence between artistic and curatorial practice, when artists and curators began to imitate each other accompanied by a turn towards more organisational, collaborative and relational models of working. This research has shown how the group exhibition became understood as a medium of communication for both artists and curators, in the sense of being a vehicle through which the experience and knowledge of art is formulised, established and maintained. What began as a critique of artistic autonomy by a few curators in the late 1960s turned, in the 1990s to exhibitions being employed as another form of cultural production, with individual curators, curator-artists and artist-curators being recognised for their own signature style, thematic consistency and creative sensibility, built up across a series of self-directed projects. Curating is now a fully recognised mode of self-presentation within the contemporary art field and, as another form of creative authorship, it has contributed to dissolution of the boundaries between the traditional genres of art-making. As a principal site for self-articulation in the field of art, the group exhibition is now employed by both artists and curators as a primary communicative medium and/or a genre of artistic production. Evidence shows how there has been a gradual breakdown of categories of specialisation within artistic practice since the 1980s, which has also contributed to a more collaborative approach to exhibition organisation and artistic co-production. Whether a curator can also be considered an artist and vice versa is still the subject of much debate but, as has been argued, refusal to accept such a possibility implies a rather limited view of what constitutes the practice of the curator or the artist. As a collaborative medium of communication involving a multiplicity of artistic and curatorial positions, the curated group exhibition expands our understanding of the triangular network of artist-curator-audience, and provides the means of disputing the creative and aesthetic autonomy of art.

Although this dissertation provides evidence of a great plurality of curatorial styles and positions – articulated within discussions, anthologies and published proceedings from summits – curators have generally communicated with a positivistic approach to their field as a method of positioning their own practice within the curatorial as a whole. As shown throughout Part One of this submission, curating in practice is now informed by an ensemble of authorised statements from within the curatorial field which have been brought together over the past twenty years and are now classifiable as an identifiable body of knowledge. The point has been reached at which curatorial discourse can be described as a field of enquiry,

informed and affected by the culmination of these statements, almost entirely configured around the central figure of the curator as creative individual – in spite of the numerous efforts by artists and curators to generate more collaborative models of group curating.

There remains a disparity within the field as a whole – between the contemporary curator's visibility and amnesia toward the curatorial past – which has stemmed from the super-visibility of a relatively small number of curators and a tendency for curatorial publications to rely on first-person re-presentations of the most recent projects. The establishment of new textual material necessitated, and still requires, a move away from autobiographical accounts towards a critical reflection upon the curatorial practice of others, past and present, while acknowledging its potential future projections. With this in mind, I commissioned new essays from twenty curators commenting on the curatorial endeavours of others. The resulting publication, *Curating Subjects*, completed in 2007, was edited and published alongside this research project and, although it does not form part of this submission, its findings are evident throughout the body of text. Many of the essays are referred to directly as they provide much-needed perspectives from the current generation of curators, looking at the curatorial practice of their predecessors and relating this knowledge to their immediate contemporaries.[538]

Part Two of this submission attempted to demonstrate how the exhibition operates as a setting for the structuring of the experience of art and its viewership through an imposed curatorial and spatial framework and to show how the curatorial role is made manifest, through collaborative and collective exhibition-making structures applied through close involvement with artists during all stages of the exhibition production. The curatorial projects associated with this study provided a research tool for practically engaging with the techniques of exhibition-making and as the means through which the curatorial frame, or the curator's signature, could be demonstrated as only one component in the co-production of an exhibition's formation.

It was my intention to investigate and to demonstrate through practice how the group exhibition is a negotiated space of co-production between curators and participating artists and to make a case for the group exhibition as an artistic medium in its own right.

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[538] O'Neill, Paul, Ed, *Curating Subjects*, op. cit. For reviews of this book, see Charlesworth, JJ. 'Curating Subjects', *Art Review*, No. 12, (June, 2007), pp. 165; Aroni, Maria. 'Curating Subjects/ Questions of Practice: What Makes a Great Exhibition?' *Untitled*, No. 42, (Summer, 2007), pp. 18-19.

Each of the four exhibitions realised alongside this research (described in Part Two and accompanied by a CD Power Point presentation submitted as Appendix Two) gathered form through a process of curatorial research while maintaining a consistency of visual style and spatial organisation across the series. By applying an overarching curatorial framework to distinct, yet inter-related, exhibition forms, I have shown how certain categories of organisation – such as the background, middle-ground and foreground – can be applied to the group exhibition form as a means of revealing how exhibitions are always the result of complex negotiations between curators and artists as the co-producers of the final exhibition form made present for an audience. By making these inter-relations apparent from the outset, it was my intention to converge the differences between collaborative and authorial structures during a process of co-production, leading to the construction of co-operative and co-authored group exhibition-formations.

In considering how curators have tended to focus on the group exhibition as a transformative model of individually-led praxis, this study has shown how exhibition-making has developed into a dominant medium of creative expression and as the primary means through which we experience and comprehend the working relations between artistic production, its organisation, its mediation and its reception. What this research has also shown is how curatorial practice and discourse is dialectically entwined, with a recoding of curatorial practice as discourse during the emergent stage of the 'curator's moment' in the 1990s. The effects of a shift of power from artist to curator within contemporary art discourse and the global culture industry on the whole require further examination. In particular, its influence upon contemporary art criticism at a time when curators are also critics for the same art magazines, journals and review publications. Whereas the role of curatorial practice within an increasingly influential global art market deserves a careful study of its own.

Finally, what this dissertation – and the related series of exhibitions – has shown is that curatorial practice which began with an interest in the demystification of art's mediation in the late 1960s has developed into another creative medium akin to artistic practice, for both artists and curators alike. Through the process of researching, selecting, planning, organising, structuring, framing and curating group exhibitions, as an artist and curator, I begin to understand my own practice while understanding the work of artists and of other curators. As my subject matter is curatorial, so are my research processes; when I curate, I am involved in a process of making art and of making exhibitions material. The

curatorial process constructs ideas about art, as well as the curatorial. The curating and organisation of each and every exhibition contributes to a greater understanding of these ideas as much as it actively produces them. Having begun this thesis as a way of generating new material in response to certain gaps in curatorial knowledge, I hope to have assembled a more historically conversant foundation for its future production. Questioning how knowledge has been produced from within the curatorial field is only the beginning of a process of demystifying how a culture of curating and the curating of culture has developed over the last twenty years.

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Part Three

Appendix One: Interviews 1

A-H

The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s): The Development of Contemporary Curatorial Discourse in Europe and North America since 1987

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy/

Paul O'Neill

School of Art & Design

Middlesex University

August, 2007

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIBED*

* All interviews took place in person unless otherwise stated. They were transcribed as accurately as possible from the original audio recordings. All interviews were then sent to the interviewee for fact checking. In some cases the transcribed interviews were edited by the subject, these edits are catalogued by the date of receipt of these texts in the Editorial Notes. Otherwise the date of completion of each Transcription is noted here. This Appendix is bound in two parts of which this entails the first part in alphabetical order.

Index of Contents: A - H

Footnote Ref Code	Subject	Place, Date of Recording	Editorial Notes
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AMI BARAK

Paris, 18-11-04

PAUL O'NEILL: Would you describe yourself as a curator or is this a term you are uncomfortable with in relation to what you do?

AMI BARAK: On the first line of my record I always write curator, but I am at the same time an art critic because this is my background. Before I started to curate, I was working as an art critic and then I switched to curating. It was in the late eighties. I'm also teaching, these are the three jobs I do, or among the jobs I do. But what comes first is curating.

PON: What was your first curatorial project?

AB: My first curatorial project was an exhibition I did in the late eighties and it was about photography. I established a kind of parallel, on one side the school of Düsseldorf and on the other side the school of Vancouver, if we can call them schools, two interesting ways of dealing with photography at that time and so on the one hand you had the post-Becher works of Ruff, Strüth and Gursky, and on the other hand I showed Jeff Wall, Ken Lum, Rodney Graham.

PON: Where was this?

AB: The show was in Milano.

PON: How would you describe your current practice?

AB: For ten years I ran a place which was interesting because it was a small place which was more a kind of Kunsthalle or an art centre, but at the same time we had a collection. For a curator those two things are at the same time different, separate but also connected. So the issue was, how is it possible to connect those two things, and so I faced questions like, what does it mean to improve a collection of exclusively contemporary art in the early nineties? At the same time, I used as a curator the relation with my background as an art critic, although not in a conscious way at

the beginning. An art critic is somebody who is committed to supporting artists. It' s about choice, as an art critic you are making a choice. You can be an art critic always unsatisfied and unhappy with what' s going on, or the opposite, be someone who is supporting a group of artists, a movement or a context, and so that was in a way my raison-d' être in my job in Montpellier. I ran the Frac Languedoc-Roussillon for ten years and I put up a very specific programme which worked very well in the nineties because of its 'emergency' profile. I even developed the concept of 'emergency' and this, by the way, established my reputation. I still have this reputation of being someone more involved with young artists, but it' s not only a question of age, it' s more a question of zeitgeist, what you are doing in this specific moment and what is your relation to the present time. I did quite a lot of solo shows with artists who at that time were unknown artists and eventually became quite famous. For example, I did the first solo show of Douglas Gordon in France. The first solo show of Rirkrit Tiravanija, the first solo show of Pierre Huyghe, of Pierre Bismuth, of Christine Borland and the first solo show of plenty of other artists, Claude Closky, and so on, there' s a long list, it' s a really long list! This was more or less my position, running a small place, having a small budget and at the same time being the most up to date and as I told you, running a collection and making acquisitions every year, and responding to the question, what kind of works to purchase and why. At the back of my mind, I had this idea of investing and seeing if it was a correct decision only in a few years' time. It' s challenging. I know that the new generation of curators, because they had their experience in curatorial programmes, are dealing more with strong concepts and putting artists together. I was more involved with commissioning works, having projects with artists and developing projects, more than putting up group shows with main subject matters and building up an exhibition.

PON: Was there a particular reason for this focus on solo projects and commissions?

AB: Yes, it was entirely for material reasons, because it was a small place with a small budget. A group show is always more expensive. It was always funny for me to look at other curators having nice and big ideas, and not being able to put up the projects because of a lack of budget.

PON: Do you think there are dominant models of curatorial practice that have developed since the late eighties or early nineties?

AB: I think that there are new forms of curating basically because there is now such a profession. When I started as a curator in the late eighties, it was very unclear, by the way, what it meant and what kind of job it was. It was a different job. On the one hand you had people in the museums, and on the other hand, very few curators were working in an ethical way. There were very few mythical personalities like Harald Szeemann. All these Kunstvereins and Kunsthalles and art centres were quite new, and in terms of curating, it wasn't so much about being different, even the idea of new ways of curating was emerging. It was the starting point.

PON: Were there any past curatorial models, exhibitions or historical precedents or precursors that have been an influence or had an impact on your practice?

AB: I was trying not to be influenced. I mentioned Harald Szeemann because he was a mythical personality, this idea of him as an artist-curator. I was always impressed by what Kasper König did in the eighties, more than any other curators, and I went to see more or less all his shows.

PON: You were obviously spending a lot of time in Germany at the time?

AB: I have been based in France, but I was going to Germany quite often as well. The other person whom I would like to mention and

had an influence on me was Christian Bernard. He is a very interesting personality. Unfortunately he is less famous than others, but first of all I was impressed because every show was extremely well done, and this was also one of the issues at stake – you can have a strong idea or a concept, but if the show is boring, and not well done in terms of the installation, the display, the connection among the works, well… With Christian Bernard, it was always strong in terms of the concept but also very well done. A perfect way to install a show, to think of a display, to develop connections between the works and this was a model for me.

PON: Were there any shows that you remember specifically?

AB: He had a series of group shows in Villa Arson because at that time he was running Villa Arson, entitled 'Sous Le Soleil', under the sun.

PON: In *The Power of Display, History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights an art historical amnesia towards innovative exhibitionary display practice of the past, in particular the laboratory years from the ninety twenties to fifties and the curatorial role played by people such Alexander Dorner, Frederick Kiesler, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, etcetera. Do you think that this amnesia or this repressed history has affected the way we perceive ultimately contemporary art curating?

AB: Yes, amnesia is when something strong happens to you, as when you are amnesiac after an accident. I don't think history forgets because of a strong incident. I think it's a self-defense process. I was once asked if I could explain what was going on now, comparing with what happened in the past, and I said, well, the the first generation of the radical artist, they were supposed to kill their father and the new generation, they're supposed to fuck their mother! And this means they cannot be innocent, they cannot claim that this didn't exist, but they have to prove that the

process is more important than the result, and I don't think it's amnesia. It's only a way to be reminded that something has already been done - something happened before and there is no such a thing as newness. Somebody who is able to have, as an artist, a different way to get to the same result and even if what you see looks or sounds like something which has already been done before, somewhere else, it's OK.

PON: Do you think that should be made visible within the mediation of these new projects, and one of the general perceptions is that curating as a creative activity only began recently?

AB: Yes, probably, I agree.

PON: OK. Are there any current curatorial projects or initiatives that you think are perhaps breaking new ground?

AB: It is something that is a recurrent discourse, at least for the new generation. I received a press release about the new show at the ICA, London, proposed by John Baldessari called '100 Artists See God'. It's really nothing new in curating, but they are now claiming that it's part of something, which is going to break new ground. You can say about anything that it's breaking new ground, but at the same time, what is most difficult for a curator is to deal with the artists who would like to escape this. What a curator is supposed to do, is to include more or less everything, even the most transgressive, even the most problematic, and to support the artist who would like to escape this.

PON: Do you think curating is something to do with producing the possibilities within which artists can produce these escapist models or something?

AB: Yes, I would say, yes.

PON: A key term used by Seth Siegelaub during the late sixties in relation to the changing role of the curator, was 'demystification'. Do you think that this term is still relevant in evaluating or establishing contemporary curatorial practice? Do you think it's a term that's ultimately still important?

AB: It should be! I've noticed, mainly in the nineties, something that appeared to be marketing the curatorial practice. The PR and communication became a very important part of it, and this is the kind of internal model which didn't use to be an internal model of the practice, it was something from other fields and of course we had to face it in more and more biennials and totally marketed exhibitions. It almost became an entertainment industry and this tried to mystify the work, because as a myth, of course, it's easier to communicate and even to sell.

PON: In the shows that you mentioned in the late eighties and early nineties, and when you were running the FRAC, did you use the term 'curated by' in the information that was supplied, in order to publicise or mediate the projects?

AB: No, never, but it wasn't necessary because I was the person who curated every show, except for very few ones when I invited other people to curate.

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is? How would you describe a good curated art exhibition?

AB: I would say it should rely on an interesting and strong idea, which would be supported by good works, and in a good display.

PON: What is a good display?

AB: When you're able after the show to remember the works which are close to the other works you had noticed originally, that's something which is important. If I can remember what is near a

work then I can say the display was well done. If I can replay or reformulate the scenario or the display in my memory easily, it's the sign of a good display.

PON: The term 'performative curating' is often used to describe a self-reflexive, self-critical art practice, or curating practice like that of Maria Lind, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Nicolas Bourriaud and others. Do you think that this is a term that is appropriate to describe the idea of shows being as much about curating as about the work on display?

AB: I think that they are very different, the three of them. In Maria's case, mainly in the Kunstverein in Munich, it was obvious and clear that she wanted to introduce a more performative way of curating, that's for sure. Less of the display of objects and more of something which is related to discussion, debate, ideas. I don't think it is as relevant in the case of Hans Ulrich or of Nicolas Bourriaud. But the question is now, well, should it be a model and did this work? This is the question.

PON: One of the arguments that Rebecca Gordon-Nesbitt, in her essay, 'Harnessing the Means of Production', critiques both Maria Lind's practice and also that of Charles Esche, who's also involved in what's called 'new institutionalism', or where certain kinds of performance of curating ultimately intend, or at least attempt to transform the institution from inside, and her criticism was and is that ultimately it co-opts a certain artistic practice which is ultimately process based, and ultimately absorbs any possibility, absorbs and mutes any possibility of transformability by this co-option by the institution.

AB: Curating without co-optation for me is a non-sensical statement. I would say it's a paradox, as if the ultimate radical gesture of a curator should be to have a show without art, or artists, in a way. It's impossible, for my generation at least. I never forgot that I was working with art objects, art ideas and

artists, so the starting point is the artist, and the end of the process is the artist as well. It really has been my obsession, but it's probably part of my personality, to make sure that the show was good, that the artist was happy. I have seen so many shows on exhibition that were so called nice exhibitions, and important events, and the artists were very, very frustrated. So the point is, why it's so easy for the curator to skip this question, just to erase it in a way.

PON: You mentioned the idea of escape or the idea of transgression within the art exhibition on behalf of the artist, as an expression of a form of resistance or, some form of resistance to the curatorial framework. Do you think that a good curated show should ultimately incorporate and enable that resistance to take place, so you don't get this frustration you seem to be touching on?

AB: Yes, I would really like to, I can give examples. I did a group show once in Vienna entitled 'Café de Paris', it was in the early nineties and an Austrian artist had a very interesting project. He had put a suitcase in a corner, with a label above, it had the name of the artist, and the date, it was untitled, and it was a leather bag and that was all. But in fact, three and a half or four metres higher up on the wall, there was a button, and in the bag was a bomb, a real one, and if somebody was able to reach this button and to push the button, the whole show would be crushed and there would be a big explosion, for real, and of course in the show nobody knew about it, except the artist and the curator, because otherwise it would have been impossible, even to imagine that somebody would accept such a risk, and for me it was a real issue, morally, intellectually, philosophically, just to face this kind of thing and it's interesting because I've been thinking about this and even when I'm teaching, you know, I mention this, because it was a real challenge and for me, it was a real curatorial challenge, morally speaking. Are you allowed to defend such a project, which is about life and death? I think this

is the model used when Chris Burden did his show in MOCA in the very early nineties, I don't know if you remember this show. What he did was to dig into the foundation of the museum; he wanted to get to the first foundation stone of the museum, to dig a big hole. And he did this, 'The Jack show', in Newhaven, with this big jack, which was likely to crush the museum if every visitor in the museum you know, pushed the big jack, and every visitor was supposed to stretch the jack and I don't know, two hundred thousand visitors were likely to crush the museum, and I would always say this is a project dealing with the fundamentals of the institution! In such a case, the institution and the curator accept this kind of ultimate move, the crushing or the death of the institution, philosophically speaking, symbolically speaking. It's an institutional critique, of course. It's typically for the modern, in the academic time, the institution was supposed to be the place of the official art, and in the modern, the twentieth century modern, the institution developed the opposite discourse, it's the place of the non-official art, mainly to welcome the most transgressive.

PON: Do you think we need any more international biennials?

AB: I don't know, I like biennials, contemporary art is also connected to travelling, meeting, meetings and I think it's always good for a city to host a biennial. I'm not against biennials.

PON: Do you believe that the international biennial has become the new autonomous artwork?

AB: No. Fortunately not!

PON: I am thinking of autonomy in the way in which the 'Venice Biennale' is being discussed in a way that's completely decontextualised from the social, cultural and economic specifics of the city itself, so somehow the exhibition is talked about or discussed in a way that disallows for an engagement with those

specifics. We talk about 'Documenta' in a way that it's compared with the previous 'Documentas'.

AB: Yes, but it's so different. The aim and the role of 'Documenta' is to offer every five years a panorama on what's going on. Not every 'Documenta' is fulfilling this, that's for sure. Mainly the last two or three 'Documenta' were much more obsessed with history than present times. For the last two 'Documenta' the curators wanted to express their position in a historical context, and I don't think this is the main aim of 'Documenta'. At the 'Venice Biennale', first of all, you have two parts, the national, the nationalistic, which is problematic, and the other part which is more or less a kind of curatorial statement of a personality. It's a mix up, I think, of the national and the international. I would say the 'Venice Biennale' is more a supermarket, and we all are the customers of this supermarket.

PON: Recently Jens Hoffmann asked a question to a number of predominant artists, should the next 'Documenta' should be curated by an artist? Do you think that the next 'Documenta' should be curated by an artist?

AB: I think in the history of curating, in this very short history of curating, the striking point has been this very ambiguous and in a way double role of the curator, who is a curator and an artist too. If an artist is curating, is he an artist or a curator? And if he is curating as an artwork, it means you don't need curators anymore. If what a curator is doing is an artwork, we're done with curating. I would prefer, you know, the nice model of Bertrand Lavier's 'Martin Show'. It was I think in 1986, in the Kunsthalle in Berne, he did a show, which was called 'The Martin Show'. He had an art project, which was to show only works of artists named Martin, because Martin was the most common last name, at least in Europe. In France it is the most common last name, in Germany, in the UK. So he decided to have a show with

more than, I don't know, fifty works, every artwork was done by a modern artist and was a mixture of Agnes Martin, with totally kitsch and low profile stuff that nobody knew about. For me, it was a perfect show, because again, what the artist did was to curate, but at the same time, it was a kind of parody, an ironic statement as a curator, and at the same time it was about Lavier's readymade ideas, it was always dealing with the readymade and in that case the artists started to become readymades. But well, why not a 'Documenta' curated by an artist, I am not sure it is going to change anything. When an artist starts to make a selection of other artists, he, for sure, will develop a curatorial practice.

PON: Do you think a curated art exhibition can be a work of art in itself?

AB: It can. Yes, it certainly can. The example is Bertrand Lavier. Because I can say that some of the artists, you know, in this follow-up of the post-conceptual attitude, really wanted to be there, where the artists hadn't been before. The artist as a curator, the artist as a collector, the artist as a filmmaker, the artist as a, I don't know, dancer, writer, every nook and cranny of the art field, I would say, mainly on the edges, you know, was a possible field where they hadn't set their foot before. This is something, which we've started noticing in the last decade, after the Second World War. You know, I am still the President of IKT. IKT is the International Association of Contemporary Art Curators, and this gives me, by the way, an idea because I'm going to Warsaw tomorrow, to organise the next Congress of IKT which will take place in Warsaw and Krakow; every Congress has a discussion, and maybe we should discuss this idea of the curator as an artist and the artist as a curator. For me, it doesn't change matters radically, and it's a good gimmick of Jens, but at the same time… Now, for example, in Toulouse you have this 'Printemps de Toulouse', which is two weeks mostly oriented towards photography and video, but also performances. It's an annual event in Toulouse, and this year and the following year, the curator is the

artist Jean-Marc Bustamante. But nothing has changed, there is no difference between Toulouse curated by an artist or curated by a curator, not because it's Jean-Marc Bustamante whom is the curator, just because Jean-Marc Bustamante did the same job that a curator would have done. In this job he is not an artist any longer, he is a curator.

PON: But it's also interesting that it happens to be a festival or an event that's focused on contemporary photography, because no curator ultimately has come to the fore in the last ten to fifteen years that ultimately is primarily involved in the curating of art exhibitions that are photographic, because somehow it's almost, photography as a medium is almost too stable, it doesn't have the same level of flexibility, shall we say, as other mixed media art exhibitions.

AB: I really think a curator cannot exist without art, at least for the moment. But an artist can exist without a curator, at least for the moment. I am looking forward to the day when a curator will exist without artists, nor art!

PON: I still think that most, in the last ten to fifteen years, predominantly that there has been a necessity, not only produced by curators in relation to their own role in the distribution and mediation and production of contemporary art, but I also think that there is a necessity or need being also produced by artists, and there is a co-dependency, particularly within the international, mobile, nomadic.

AB: I think it's more a dependency on the curator's side, but I don't think it's a dependency on the market's side.

PON: How important is the role of criticism to your practice as a curator and this is a deliberately open ended question.

AB: I was, I still am, an art critic, but unfortunately I would say the criticism is not relevant at all. Not because it shouldn't be, but because it's not able to, unfortunately. It was the same with the public, you know, do we need a public or not, as a curator?

PON: Can you tell me about your involvement with 'Nuit Blanche'?

AB: I would say it's a special involvement, because, it was dealing with something which we are not used to, which means a big audience, and it's a very big audience indeed, and the big majority is not at all used to contemporary art. So the big majority is not our regular customers - people who don't go to the museum, to the art centre. And I'm still wondering why suddenly they are there, and it's impossible not to, in a way, take it into account this big crowd. Curatorially speaking, I really behaved as I have always done, which means first put up a concept and then have a selection of artists according to this concept, and then ask artists to have a project according to it. This is for me the basics of curatorial practice. But at the same time I had to be aware of this parameter, which is the public. I hadn't done so before.

I know that it's probably different in America, because of the funding system in museums or foundations. They have to deal with the idea of the public, the audience. But in Europe, this idea is really not part of the remit. In this case, it was compulsory to take the public into account. First of all, because this kind of event is mostly outdoor, and yet has to be visible; it's not at all protected by the limits of the institution and you had to consider the project also according to this parameter – the crowd. Some of my colleagues were quite critical but for me it was challenging because I had to introduce another criteria, which was the public, which is something we never discussed in a curatorial course.

PON: That's interesting, thank you.

END OF TAPE

CARLOS BASUALDO

Venice, 10-06-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator or is this a term you are comfortable with?

CARLOS BASUALDO: I think that the term curator is so open that in terms of the possibilities that it gives you; it is for me an interesting and productive point of view. Not so much because there is a meaning attached to it, with which I feel comfortable, but mostly because the meaning is so open and so open for redefinition. The very history of curatorial practice is so recent that I think that it explains why the very term is so in flux. I first started thinking about doing exhibitions in Argentina, where I was mostly involved in writing poetry and with many discussions at that time in the eighties on the relationship between literature and the social sphere, to put it that way, which was a rather interesting subject because Argentina was coming out of a very long and painful dictatorship. At that point I felt that, because of somehow the way Argentina is also a young country but with a quite strong literature background and because of that I felt constricted by discussions at that time. As an interested and somehow informal observer of the art scene, I could detect that the level of discussion was much more, to me, interesting, it was more vital, it was more alive and there was an opportunity of reaching an audience, of talking with an audience, of working within the sphere of the arts. So I first became interested in curatorial practice because I thought that I could still think, but think in front of a real effective audience. That was my point of departure.

PON: You studied at the Whitney Independent Study Programme?

CB: That was a little bit later. I started writing for a local newspaper and working informally with artists and organising shows in my city and then in 1994 I went to the States to do the Whitney Independent Study Programme, but I didn't do the curatorial programme but the critical studies programme. I think that is important for me in a way, because I never saw my practice strictly speaking in managerial or organisational terms. I always felt that there was a very important point of departure, which was art history and my project at the Whitney was very much involved with the possibility of thinking about the work of the neo-concrete artists in parallel with post-minimal practices in the States. That has always informed my

practice. I have never conceived the role of the curator outside of a certain intellectual exercise that somehow passes through, or traverses through an understanding of art history.

PON: Do you see the relationship between your work as a curator and as a writer as being interdependent?

CB: Yes I do. And I think more and more. As a writer, for me, it is a conscious choice. When I am writing about art or about exhibitions, to try to interpolate the position of the historian. I don't want to be a poet in my art writing. Of course I think that the relationship with languages is important to me and to try to explore the density of language, but that is not my goal when I am writing as a critical curator, when I am writing from that perspective. I think communication becomes the most important aspect of my practice as a writer, but I do believe that the curator is a scholar as well. I think maybe not a scholar in the traditional sense but a scholar nonetheless, so I think that it is problematic to conceive of the curatorial role outside of the exercise of writing. I think it is very interesting, in terms of what I know about your project, you seem to approach curatorial practice from the point of reflection and writing. I think that's extremely needed in a context in which this disassociation between the scholar and the curator seems to be producing as a result more managers that are very skilful and capable of dealing with complex organisational situations, but not able to reflect on the larger meaning of these.

PON: Do you think this has something to do with an expansion of a global art market or the increase in the number of international art exhibitions or the influence of post-graduate curatorial training programmes?

CB: Well some training programmes are trying to add a reflective layer. I think it is almost a consequence of and the conflation between entertainment and the art system, a thing which has been endlessly described and referred but nonetheless it is still a reality and I think, of course this seems to be producing this as a sort of collateral consequence somehow.

PON: Do you think there are dominant forms of curatorial practice that have developed in the last 15-20 years, a kind of post-Szeemannian position, a post-author position, maybe after 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in 1989?

CB: I think that is a periodisation that still needs to be done. I haven't been able to … in the literature, you know I teach this course on histories of exhibitions, the literature is so far not sufficient to even identify that first emergence of the role of the curator. If you look at the sixties you find practices that are so different because people like Pontus Hulten or Kynaston McShine were museum directors or institutional curators. The independent curator, as such, seems to have emerged around the figure of Harald Szeemann. Even in the sixties you find positions that are very different or somebody who is usually forgotten but I think an extraordinary figure is Lawrence Alloway. So all of them seem to be quite different in terms of their approach to curatorial practice. So I think that in a way, even at that time the wealth of positions was so dramatic that I don't feel that subsequent decades have added much to that existent complexity.

PON: Do you think that curating is now more self-reflexive?

CB: Yes, there is a level of self-reflection of course, even in the work of Harald Szeemann from the beginning, you know when he founded the office and the way he writes about the office approving the projects of the curator and executing them his own reflection, very early on, about the model of the film director being very much a model of the curator. In the moment when he instituted himself as an independent curator, that very institutionalisation of the figure of the curator, which was maybe an ironic instance of institutionalisation, was I believe a process of self-reflection. So you can say that the emergence of the independent curator is already a moment of self-reflection, but clearly of course in the last ten years maybe that has happened in a much more programmatic way with the work of people like Hans Ulrich Obrist of course and with the curatorial courses, which have emerged at the same time here and there. I think that if I am not mistaken in 1994 when I did the Whitney there was only Le Magasin and the RCA was just setting up. So you only had Le

Magasin and the Whitney. There has been an extraordinary explosion since then.

PON: Do you think these curating courses, programmes, have impacted on our perception of the curator or even on the recent developments in the relationships between curatorial practice and the production of art exhibitions?

CB: Certainly in the popularisation of the role of the curator. I don't know. Everybody seems to understand what a curator is. If you say you are a curator you become a recognisable figure, but I don't know if they have made clear the role of the curator.

PON: Do you think it is important to configure that role?

CB: I think it would be important to be more analytical about the possibilities of curatorial practice.

PON: Since you have been practising since the eighties, what would you perceive as the key developments within curatorial discourse during the period you have been practising as a curator?

CB: The eighties could have been the first period in which curatorial practice became, there were people like Collins and Milazzo, and Christian Lee ('The Silent Baroque') who were important, especially in the American context. There was a moment in which there was a lot of activity. Some of these people were very close to the market and of course that was right after the 'Trans-Avant-Garde'. I think there were other experiences working more with art and activism that were more equally productive and of course towards the end of the eighties then you have the first people interested in reflecting a more global situation for the arts. I won't say that… if we were speaking about the history of curatorial practice I would say that the late sixties are a very significant moment if we want to speak about the post-war period and then the nineties are a very significant moment. I don't find the eighties as rich as the previous or the following decade.

PON: There were also people like Group Material and General Idea and Martha Rosler in the eighties?

CB: Exactly, and those experiences they didn't define themselves strictly speaking as curators. They were complex artistic practices, which I think were incredibly productive, but if we would think about the history of curatorial practice itself, about the contributions by people who define themselves as curators even by producing, even by reflecting, even by attempting a definition of what curatorial is, I think that the previous periodisation would be more productive.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents or precursors have been an influence on your practice as a curator?

CB: Well recent ones of course I think 'Documenta X' and Catherine David in general. I think Catherine was a different curator before 'Documenta X' and possibly a different curator after 'Documenta X', but I think that she became a very strong position in 'Documenta X'. I think she was very important for all of us, for the people of my generation. We were part of beautiful discussions with Hans Ulrich, Hou Hanru and Bart de Baere, we were all seated at that table at Catherine's house in Kassel. I think she was very productive. Those discussions were very productive for us. So I think that if I would have to look back I would rather start with what is closer and I think that it was Catherine's 'Documenta X'. Other than 'Documenta X', I am particularly interested in the work of Pontus Hulten and Kynaston McShine. It becomes more difficult. I think that I learnt to look at and study those practices, but I won't say that any of those practices singularly has been so determinate for me, but 'Documenta X' was an amazing laboratory.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls an art historical 'amnesia', 'repressed history' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past particularly the laboratory years from the 1920s-1940s. Do you think this amnesia or a repression of a history has affected the way we perceive contemporary art curating?

CB: Of course, but that's changing. I mean that book was written in 1998. There has been progressively more literature about it. I still,

when I teach my class on Alexander Dorner, I still speak about how little discussed Dorner is, but now that is not exactly the case. I think, of course, the way in which modern art was reconstructed after the war as an autonomous, even formal kind of aesthetic exercise, it required the disappearance of the exhibition. You know because exhibition was not only like a physical medium, it was also the connection with the world of commerce, the world of politics and the world of the spectacle. The notion of art as an autonomous practice was basically constructed ideologically as an exercise in forgetfulness, in terms of those kind of, those were the dangerous lessons from which modern art had to purify itself through the belief in autonomy. You know the baby was thrown out with bath water and so nobody would speak about exhibitions. Exhibitions are dirty, from the beginning they have relationships with the spectacle, they have relationships with commerce, they have relationships with politics. They are always enmeshed in the life of a society, which is you know made of those sort of connections. When you start bringing them again you have to first of all shed the illusion of art considering art as an autonomous practice. I think that I don't know if we are still there and that is the direction in which I would personally like the discussion to evolve towards and I think that is the direction that I impress in my teaching. I think from that perspective it is easy to understand why for a certain period of time that density was not taken by art history.

PON: In your essay 'The Unstable Institution', published in the *Manifesta Journal*, on one level it read as a useful literature review of existing material particularly in relation to contemporary curatorial discourse, but on another level there seemed to be a suggestion that the curator has somehow replaced the critic in terms of visibility of a certain mode of dominant practice?

CB: That I think is in evidence. I mean I try to just remain at the level of the evidence. There are no strong critics anymore. I think that there is a crisis in academia. I think it still remains to be seen if the curator is able to engage in a critical discussion because you know critics usually blame this emphasis in curatorial practice because they see curatorial practice as purely managerial and as affiliated with the spectacle. I think that's a little bit jumping to

a conclusion. I don't think that if we can name a history of curatorial practice going from Dorner to Kynaston McShine, to Lawrence Alloway, clearly in which you have critical curatorial practice. But I think that this still needs to remain clear. Maybe the kind of critical apparatus that is displayed, that is performed, that is being performed in the practice of a curator is slightly different from the traditional critic. I think it is, but it is part of a larger transformation. You know as I try to basically also describe, there is this phenomenon of museums, but also large exhibitions becoming commissioners of work more and more and that also changes the modern, let's say system, the art system in its modern moment.

PON: There are two things that seem to dominate contemporary curatorial discourse or the debates around curating as a critical practice. One is the dominance of biennials and the second is the artist versus curator situation. Do you think that either of these arguments is useful?

CB: I would rephrase them slightly. I would replace biennials by large-scale exhibitions, and then we can understand blockbusters and fairs as part of the same category. I think that we have to look at them from a structural point of view, we will see that they perform, more or less, the same kind of operation. So isolating biennials only just misses the point in terms of the transformation of art's role in society and economy. And in terms of the artist as curator, I would rather focus on the position of the curator…I think that it's not so much a question of different, of other positions in the art system taking the role of the curator, but the role of the curator being deskilled and open enough by it's very nature that it is in flux and could be easily taken by other positions, meaning on the one hand there is more and more artists acting as curators, but there has been since the sixties as well, you can even say the figure that is parallel to Harald Szeemann is Marcel Broodthaers, founding his own museum… But in terms of this mirroring quality of the relationship between artists and curatorial practice that remains a very important moment, but likewise since the eighties you have many intellectuals or philosophers, or people coming from other disciplines being asked to perform the curatorial role. So I think that those exercises speak more about the fact that the curatorial role is less of a fixed role

than an open position, a position that has emerged out of a structural necessity and as such it's very mobile and very flexible.

PON: How do you think that your experience of working as part of a biennial such as the 'Venice Biennale' in 2003 impacted upon your perception of your role as a curator?

CB: I mean it definitely makes me aware of… I mean I called large-scale exhibitions 'unstable institutions' because they are definitely an institutional category and I think, at least in the sense of my participation in some of these, has made me aware of the characteristics of these institutions and made me more aware of the connections with spectacle, politics and commerce than if I was a curator working within a more traditional museum context.

PON: The visibility that comes with such a large-scale exhibition, did that impact upon how you would have mediated your curatorial practice? For example there were a number of curators involved in Francesco Bonami's 'Venice Biennale' in 2003. There were a number of curatorial voices regardless of whether you see them as isolated; there was certainly a differentiation between different kinds of articulation?

CB: I think that my generation has become visible through shows like 'Documenta' and the 'Venice Biennale', but I think the visibility, it is a little bit too early to say. I think that so far, we have been all lumped together, these people who have emerged with globalisation. We have been relating more to that phenomenon and the relation between art and spectacle and I think that is a very first approach and I think that to me that is not very interesting and hopefully with time we will be able to confront more critical approaches also relating to differences between our practices. I think you don't really control the perception of the show and you don't control the perception of your participation in the show, so I am very philosophical. I don't think very much about it.

PON: A key word used by Seth Siegelaub to clarify the changing role of a curator in the late sixties was 'demystification'. How relevant do you think this term is in relation to contemporary curatorial practice?

CB: I don't remember the context in which he used it.

PON: He talked about the idea of demystifying what the curator does in terms of the selection process, in terms of the structure, in terms of the idea that artworks don't just get juxtaposed together for their own sake, that somebody has actually produced a structure in order to enable those works to be situated together and that role happens to be that of the curator and that the curator should be somewhat visible within that and that position should be clearly articulated.

CB: It is a little bit like the discussion about direct democracy and eliminating instances of representation in politics. I do not think the solution is eliminating instances of representation and of course there is a level of mystification in representation, and of course we can think of ways in which the political context of checks and balances, or some instances of referendums and so instances of a much more dynamic politics could really better the functioning of the political apparatus, but I do not believe that avoiding representation is the answer. I am actually quite a sceptic of solutions that propose avoiding representation, likewise in terms of curatorial practice. There is a tendency or focus on the power of the curator in terms of selecting and to me I tend to have an ethical approach to it. I think that the relationship with the artists that you are working with, when you are working with artists what is clearer and clearer is that large-scale exhibitions might be seen as an opportunity for a wider reflection in which, of course, art is a very significant component and in my view should remain as such, but it is not the only element in the exhibition. It might, to the point of departure or the point of arrival - you are really dealing with much more complex systems in which you are also trying to deal with the connection, the dialogue between the arts and other aspects of cultural production. I think that's also one of the things that were clear in 'Documenta X'. It was self-referential also in the way in which Catherine David spoke about that. But in Pontus Hulten's practice that was there from the beginning and you can find that also in Kynaston McShine's first project of 'Information' and of course Harald Szeemann's 'Trilogy' is about that. So I think when you think about the curator that doesn't

curate artists in terms of selecting you know five people for a show, but really tries to work with the artists and with the logic of art production in order to think about the position of culture in society at a particular moment. When you think of somebody who is trying to at least engage in that kind of process, I think that the whole issue of how do you select or don't select is less relevant, is less urgent. I think it is much more a question of regarding the ethics or the intellectual integrity of the curator than a question of the exercise of a very limited form of power. I am not interested in the exercise of that narrowly defined form of power. I don't think I even select people in that sense.

PON: One of the issues that I have recognised within the curatorial discourse, within publications that exist within the field at the moment, is that it is a kind of self-perpetuating discourse, meaning that most of the publications that are about curating are ultimately by curators articulating their own positions and usually representing or presenting their own projects and if you look at a magazine like *Artforum* you will have curators such as Robert Storr or Bob Nickas or Dan Cameron writing for these magazines. How can the discourse change if this is the case?

CB: I think this is a little bit like a discussion I had with someone who was saying that on the one hand we have this very reflective discourse that seems to be also statements about what you do, trying to explain what you do, and on the other hand you have an art historical discourse, how do you find a meeting point? I think that is what we are trying to do with our programme, to have an art historical approach that does not define curatorial practice that is outside the art production, but we try to look at art production in a much more contextual framework. I think that there is a number of people involved in that and of course there is an involving dialogue, but it is an ongoing practice. I think that is what I would be very keen on, seeing that growing, that kind of literature and that kind of research.

PON: Which is why you are teaching on this course?

CB: Yes of course.

PON: What are you working on at the moment?

CB: I am working on a number of shows, but I think that the one that would most clearly reflect some of the things that we have been discussing is a show that opens in Chicago in October, which is a show called 'Tropicalia' 1967, and 'Tropicalia' was in Brazil in the late sixties, a sort of spontaneous movement, and I mean spontaneous because it was not a number of people who decided that they would create a movement, it somehow happened in the communication between a number of practitioners coming from different disciplines. In a way Hélio Oiticica started it with a piece called 'Tropicalia', that was inside an exhibition that he curated in collaboration with curators at the Museum of Modern Art in Rio and then a musician Caetano Veloso took the name for one of his songs and the name became a flag for an attempt to rethink Brazil, but also modernity from the perspective of the writings of Oswaldo de Andrade, the modern Brazilian writer and the notion of cultural cannibalism. So the show is an interdisciplinary show that is historical but will have a number of younger people looking back at that tradition in which there is an element of exhibition design, it has a consonance with the material that is in the show and I would say it is quite present so I would say that it is on some level it is interested in interpolating even that level of self-reflection in terms of thinking. We are restaging a show that was curated by an artist but at the same time in conjunction with theatre, music, cinema and we are trying to make that activity speak as clearly as possible to the conditions of production today. The catalogue will hopefully be a scholarly publication containing texts of the time, so as you see it is in a way, you can establish a whole lineage in terms of curatorial thinking of a show like that, but for me it is also important that it is about Brazil, which people tend to think of Brazil as the land of carnival and samba, but to think that maybe their version of what being modern might be is productive for us today. I think it is much more extraordinary and this is exactly what the show is trying to do.

PON: If you were to predict the future of curating?

CB: I think it is a little like cinema. I am not going to be optimistic about this, I think it is a little bit like cinema and I think there was, at the same time that author cinema emerged in the sixties, it was condemned or maybe it wasn't condemned, it was simply cannibalised by the system and transformed in so many ways. Maybe there was a 'death of the author', as soon as the author was born and there is a rebirth of authorship in a much more diffused way. I think that is what is probably going to happen to curatorial practice or is already happening, probably we will have a few strong positions that will then merge into a much more diffuse panorama of curatorial practice. I think that in the context of a stronger alliance between the spectacle and the arts, maybe that perspective will scare some people, but it might... I am not also nostalgic, but it simply seems to be the direction that we are moving towards.

END OF TAPE

IWONA BLAZWICK

London, 09-02-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator, or is this a term that you're comfortable with?

IWONA BLAZWICK: I had studied English and Fine Art at Exeter University. It was a combined honours course where we did studio practice, art history, aesthetics and literature, so you came out slightly jack of all trades and master of none. I thought I was going to be an artist and got a job at Petersburg Press, a private gallery who published prints and editions. I was a receptionist and every day I'd look at works by Marcel Broodthaers or Richard Hamilton or whoever; every night I would go home and make my own art. After about a year I looked at what I was making and realised it was totally derivative. This was both an epiphany and a relief. I realised I would never be a great artist, but I get so much intellectual pleasure and aesthetic stimulation from looking at art, I had to find another way of interacting with it, like writing about it or providing a platform for it. So the world was spared a very mediocre artist; but at the same time it became clear to me that curating art was what I wanted to do. I got a job at the ICA in the early 1980s, really just as a lowly assistant. But I had a fantastic boss, Sandy Nairne, who is now at the National Portrait Gallery. He was an incredible mentor. He took me to events like the 'Venice Biennale' and 'Documenta', which were for me so extraordinary. He insisted that we had an international perspective, that we saw other Kunsthalles, other models for making exhibitions and doing things. Through him, my horizons expanded exponentially. He also allowed me to go to New York and make an exhibition. I made two shows at that time as a curatorial assistant. One was part of an ICA wide season called 'Brand New York'. The show was called 'Urban Kisses, Slum Hisses', and it showed, for the first time in London, a generation of American artists such as Keith Haring, Cindy Sherman and Robert Longo. I also co-curated with Sandy and Lewis Biggs, then Director of the Arnolfini Gallery in Bristol, a show called 'Objects and Sculpture', which picked up new tendencies in British sculpture.

PON: What year was this?

IB: It was in 1981 and featured artists like Richard Deacon, Anthony Gormley, Anish Kapoor and Bill Woodrow all of whom were recently out of art school. So working at the ICA gave me that opportunity to curate, which was just brilliant. I had visited the ICA as a student. I had walked

in off the Mall, not quite knowing what it was, and found myself in what appeared to be a brothel. I looked closer and discovered it was a huge installation by the American artist, Edward Keinholz. I always wanted to go back there. Eventually I got the job there and Sandy gave me the possibility to curate. Then I left and went to the Air Gallery, which was a small, artists' space. We had absolutely no money. I had to clean the toilets, paint the walls, hang the shows, write the catalogues, but it was a great experience. I think in a way, I am part of a generation, or type of curator, who did that. We worked from the bottom up and we did everything. There is another model of curatorship, which comes out of being trained as an art historian, and which I think is a different kind of practice. These curators have come from scholarship to exhibition making whereas I come from the doing everything kind of school, which translates into another attitude and methodology, based more on production.

PON: How do you think that the role of the contemporary art curator has developed say since the 1980s when you started curating, if you were to pick out some dominant models?

IB: I think now there's a lot more pressure on marketing, audiences, fundraising, it's become an all singing, all dancing activity. You have to be a manager; you have to be a politician. I think in a way there are good and bad things to that. It's good that we think about who's coming to see what we do and why we're doing it and trying to reflect diversity. The down side is that we have to spend a lot of time raising money, thinking about marketing and all that, it's not so interesting really. This is particularly true in Britain to a far greater degree than anywhere else in Europe.

PON: I mean there is an argument to suggest that perhaps some of the art institutions have interdependent relationships with independent curators now, really because of that, because curators of main institutions haven't got the time to actually curate.

IB: That's a really good point.

PON: Most recently you moved from working as a curator on a set of exhibitions at Tate Modern to Whitechapel Art Gallery, and moved away from

an institution with a large art collection to one that primarily focuses on contemporary exhibitions. Has this move affected your thinking around your current practice as a curator?

IB: Well I certainly miss having a collection. We were spoiled in a sense of being able to look back at history. If you consider the attitude of the early European avant-gardes at the beginning of the twentieth century towards the past, it was about killing the father; it was Oedipal, dedicated to creating a tabula rasa. Today, it's almost the reverse. I think many artists are really interested in looking at the past. If you don't have a collection, that makes it all the more difficult. I was just taking a group round our exhibition, *Faces in the Crowd;* you can see the constant cross referencing, back and forth across the centuries, it's phenomenal. Janet Cardiff citing Rodchenko, Jeff Wall cites Manet. There is this back and forth across time, there is no longer this evolutionary model, kill the past, start afresh and look only to the future. It can be frustrating not having a collection, not least because it's very difficult to borrow works - you have nothing to bargain with! But the plus side is that we can be reactive, it's like going from an ocean liner to a small yacht, you know, we're a team of twenty five people and we can make decisions just like that. So I think we're more agile, we're able to duck, dive, and actually work much more closely with artists. The Tate is such a vast bureaucracy. I increasingly became a manager, never seeing any artists. At the beginning of my time there it was wonderful working on the future of Tate Modern in a very small team. Towards the end of my time there, the staff grew from four to four hundred. We spent hours locked in meetings when the real curatorial project is dialogue with either the artist or the object of art, and the ideas around them. That to me is central and I can do that more here.

PON: You've realised a number of monographic shows with artists as well as group exhibitions. Do you think that the group exhibition has become the so called serious work of every art curator?

IB: I think it's always been a critical tool for investigating an idea. For me it's a kind of 'what if?' If you put this next to that, what happens, and to me, it's a very important thing. There are two different ways of approaching it. You can illustrate a theme, that's one approach, or you can, I think, elaborate an argument by making a temporary

constellation of practices and ideas, seeing what they add up to. Once you break apart that constellation of artworks they return to the narrative of a singular artistic practice. I love that latter way of working. The group show can also put the pause button on a certain tendency. We've done that here with sculpture for example and painting. Curatorship I really admire is where you take individual components and put them together to create a kind of text or discourse, and you experience it physically, aesthetically, phenomenologically, that to me is an incredible challenge. I mean obviously for some artists, they can feel uncomfortable if they are suddenly made to be part of an argument for something they don't subscribe to. I try to engage with what their work means, what it's about, what their intention is, so I'm not misrepresenting them. For example, a couple of critics have said of the 'Faces in the Crowd' show, where is Lucien Freud? But he doesn't picture modern life; yes he's figurative, yes he's contemporary, but that's it. He's part of a very different tradition of a kind of humanism, universality and the figure. The thesis behind this show is very specific and I don't think that any artist that we've included has objected to being in it. I think they feel the argument is valid and the representation is correct. They like the experiment; the 'what if?' here is to ask whether modern art is just the story of abstraction? Can you tell an equally avant-garde, radical story through figurative art? That's how we started off; can you take a model like figuration, which is so rooted in tradition, and make it avant-garde? Is it modern?

PON: In your statement in *Stopping the Process*? in '98, you started a discussion by looking at your involvement in the show, 'Now Here', in '96, with the question: 'how can a museum be more than a historical depository?' and you ended the same article with the line, 'contingent on open transformations, the exhibition becomes the virus in the museum'. Was this a kind of response to your initial question?

IB: I think works of art change stuff around them. If you put a Daniel Buren or a Renée Green or something in the context of a group of works, the whole relationship starts changing and things start getting mixed up. We've seen artists who've been excluded from the canon do that very deliberately. If performance isn't represented in a collection, for example, how do we put it back in? How might temporary exhibitions illuminate the things that aren't represented in collections? If they are

going to be dynamic places, you have to shake them up a bit; you have to interrupt the seamless flow of chronology and the meta-narrative, rearranging it, making interventions within it. The museum representation of artists can freeze them in a time and a place, a movement or an 'ism'. I want works of art to be unlocked again. Sometimes when a work of art has hung on a wall for too long you just don't see it anymore.

PON: Are there any particular past curatorial models, exhibitions or historical precedents that have been an influence on your practice?

IB: Well certainly someone like Catherine David, and her 'Documenta X', the fact that she juxtaposed historical practices with new ones. That's something I was trying to do with 'Now Here', bringing in people like Eva Hesse, or Mary Kelly and showing how work in the seventies is important today. And certainly, people like Hans Ulrich Obrist and his contemporaries; or what Jerôme Sans and Nicolas Bourriaud are doing at the Palais de Tokyo in Paris, is very exciting. And historically people like Jan Höet, when he did the 'Chambre D'Amis', a wonderful project where people gave over their houses to works of art; Kasper König's 'Münster Skulptur Project', was really important; and then the big shows at the Pompidou, like 'L'Informe', 'Masculin Feminin'. 'L'Informe' curated by Rosalind Krauss and Yves Alain Bois represented a real intellectual enquiry, not just the celebration of a movement but a genuine argument being played out.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think this amnesia has affected the way in which we currently perceive contemporary art curating?

IB: She makes the point that the early European avant-gardes wanted to reinsert the object of art into the flux of everyday life. They got rid of distinction by medium, they never differentiated between painting, sculpture and photography; indeed neither did the paradigmatic institution, MOMA. When MOMA was founded it included cinema and photography as part of the collection from the get go. She makes the point that the older MOMA became, the more conservative it got. I think her book is absolutely critical in this debate, because it shows how coy

institutions became about sponsorship, patronage, whereas at the outset they were very up front about it. The reification of the object, the idea of the blank white space, are conventions which we think are neutral and universal. She makes the point that they are conventions. I think the end result of this process of 'purification' is a show like Manzoni at the Serpentine or Andy Warhol at the Tate, both of which seemed very problematic. They were so object based - 'let us worship Andy Warhol as a painter'. Well he was a performance artist, filmmaker, photographer, mad collector of things. All that fuzzy, dirty stuff was washed clean. The Manzoni show had no mention of his work as a performance artist, only the lovely fluffy feathery things. I found that disconnection from action, ideas, flux, a real problem. I'm not quite sure how we deal with it. 'Arte Povera' at Tate Modern had a similar problem, it was all lovely solo shows of the Arte Povera artists, amazing that they are, but something was missing for me, about the revolutionary intention, about the intellectual project. It's a real challenge, how do you represent that retrospectively? I'm not sure I have the answer but I do think it's something we need to think about.

PON: In a number of discussions you've taken part in on curating, you encourage a more research led or scholarly approach to curating art. Have these attributes been brought to the fore in your programme now at Whitechapel?

IB: I hope so, I mean, we have the great advantage of having an auditorium, a reading room and other programmes, a film programme. We work with the wonderful film curator (and artist), Ian White. He juxtaposes films with the programme and I think if you look at what he chooses, it says a lot about understanding the exhibitions. We can also explore issues through symposia, debate, publishing; and perhaps most importantly, through the juxtaposition of two spaces. It was fantastic to have the opportunity to show Paul Noble alongside Tobias Rehberger, or Liam Gillick with Helio Oiticica. In both cases we were juxtaposing these essentially utopian projects that were looking at space, environment and society. It's something we also did with Janet Cardiff/ Georges Bures Miller and Philip Lorca diCorcia; both use narratives and fiction. These are not necessarily didactic; rather they are associative, offering another form of interpretation.

PON: In a debate on curation with Catherine David at Witte de With in 2001, you suggest that one of the roles of an art institution was to expand ways of understanding cultural production. How do you see the role of curator within this expansion?

IB: Yes, I suppose it's about nurturing artists. Here we do things like peer critiques, where artists come and talk among themselves about work in progress; we also offer 'Survival Strategies' where we give guidance on how to get studio spaces, grants and so on. The creative activities of community groups and amateur societies are also interesting. The next show put together by the artists Neil Cummings and Marysia Lewandowska is about the enthusiasm of self-motivated groups, the conditions in which they emerge and how creativity percolates out.

It's also about seeing how ideas are disseminated. One of the great opportunities I had was to work with Phaidon Press on devising a series of contemporary artists' monographs. I'd only made rather conventional catalogues at that point and this project to create a different kind of publication blew the whole thing wide open. It made me interrogate how many different kinds of ways there are of writing and thinking about art. We had five different formats: the interview, the survey, the focus, the artist's own writings, and an extract from something the artist had read. I wanted to create something that was useful. This affected my thinking about all the different ways of interpreting art, criticising it, engaging with it, as part of the production of meaning.

During the 1990s I was also involved in commissioning a lot of site specific work. This offered an opportunity to work with an artist as a co-producer. It wasn't about just going to the studio and saying 'we'll have those paintings please'. It was very much, here's the idea, here's the space, here's the context. How is that going to manifest itself as a work of art? That coincided with a generation who were interested in working in that way. I was lucky enough to make a project with Mark Dion for example for a project for Tate before the Bankside Power Station was transformed into Tate Modern. Mark made a project on the banks of the Thames, engaging with lots of different communities, ranging from archeologists to troubled teenagers. It was an amazing project and it grew collaboratively. We've seen a lot of that through artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija, and of course, Tobias Rehberger. As a methodology, it's been

very important despite having now become an -ism of its own.

PON: What current curatorial projects or initiatives do you think are breaking new grounds?

IB: Jerôme and Nicolas have transformed the Palais de Tokyo into an event - the openness of it, the fact that the work is embedded in a holistic series of relationships, the fact it's open until midnight, I love all that. The street enters the gallery. That approach doesn't work quite so well here, as our locale can be pretty hostile. I like the fact you can escape the pressures of the street and have a kind of respite - it's the reverse of their situation, but I nonetheless admire the energy around what they've done. The 'Utopia Station' project - even though there's a kind of naiveté about it, nonetheless I liked the station idea acting as a satellite that could occupy different places. Okwui Enwezor's 'Documenta XI', was a very courageous and brilliant manifestation of all the issues about first and third world relations and practice emerging around post-colonialism. He really grappled with art that deploys the strategies of documentation through photography and film, which people really freaked out about. But I felt this is right, it's a prevalent form in art practice that sets out to be critical. His other consistent achievement, also demonstrated in 'Century City', this big group project at the Tate, is to map the phenomena of global modernisms. Curators like Okwui or Carlos Basualdo, another very impressive and influential curator, really communicate this sense of multiple modernisms, different global initiatives, which may look like each other, but emerge from entirely different conditions of production. It is telling for example to analyse the emergence of performance in Latin America, Eastern Europe, New York, London and Düsseldorf. In the West, with the dematerialisation of the art object, there is a direct assault on capitalism and the market place. By contrast in Chile for example, the critical content of art could become subject to political repression, the art object might be evidence of subversion which could even lead to arrest. The dematerialisation of the object and the recourse to performance, to a live, time-based action becomes a matter of expediency and of survival. Even though the emergence of conceptual art was synchronous in many parts of the world, the conditions for its evolution were entirely different.

Feminism is also very important for me. I've watched the struggle women

artists have been involved in over the years and things have changed dramatically. Today we have a whole generation of women artists who can take their right to produce and exhibit work as a given; they don't have to prove their credentials, make their identity the subject of their art anymore and that's been a tremendous change. There are still battles to be fought, but I think we've really moved on exponentially, even in the past twenty years, considering this is after 2000 years of invisibility, it's pretty dramatic.

PON: Do you think the post-graduate curating courses and institutionally led curatorial programmes have impacted upon the development of interest in curating as a professional practice?

IB: I do, I think they've been very important. The problem is, in my view this has still to filter into museums. There are lots of people doing exciting and provocative things, but they're working in Kunsthalles or for biennials, and in artists' spaces and laboratories. I would love to see some of that energy being fed into regional museums, which I think can be quite moribund, I'm afraid. Young curators should be encouraged to think about the interface between the past and the present in the way that many artists do. We need to see an engagement with historic collections, which shares the intelligence and ambition that goes into presenting contemporary art.

PON: This is a deliberately open ended question. What do you think the future of curating is?

IB: Sometimes I think curatorial authorship can become almost too dominant. I did feel that with 'Venice Biennale' 2003, the people being most talked about were the ten curators and the art somehow became secondary. I think the balance needs to be put back again. I like the fact that there are new and very distinct curatorial initiatives in Argentina and Peru, Poland and Finland that break the monopoly of the big metropolitan centres. The courses feed directly into that, giving people confidence to develop local scenes. That's what I think could be very exciting, for example to see a scene in Reykjavik or Latvia or Kinshasa. I mean, you need peace and stability, you need a degree of prosperity for all that to happen, I'm not naïve about that, but I do think that sort of self-confidence is growing. I attended a conference in Delhi, where

there's the 'Indian Triennale' which everyone locally feels is uninteresting and irrelevant. So they're planning to do a 'Delhi Biennale', and there are a lot of young artists who are saying, yes, we want to be part of it, to be on the radar.

PON: Do you think we need more biennials?

IB: I think they can be great, because what we forget, international flâneurs that we are, we might be very bored and familiar with them, but they galvanise the local scene, they raise the ante, providing an international exchange. Indian artists may not have the money to travel; if they can meet the internationally acclaimed artists they admire; and if they can share their work with us, I think it's a great opportunity. I visited a biennial in Port Allegre in Brazil, and I learned more about the history of Latin American art from that one visit than I could ever have done just visiting European art venues. It was an extraordinary show, a revelation in every way in terms not only of its historical scope but its approach to curating. One project for example, was housed in a warehouse by the great tributary of rivers that converge there. The curators had virtually no money so they invited ten artists to create works for the space based on their experience of the city, giving each one a hundred dollars to spend. Each artist created an installation based on what he or she encountered in Port Allegre and what he or she could buy with that small sum of money. The show was exceptional - the ten works portrayed the city, the economic, social and cultural exchanges that took place; at the same time it stretched the ingenuity of each artist who rose to the challenge to create remarkable works. A great example of curating with no resources but huge imagination.

END OF TAPE

SASKIA BOS

Amsterdam, 21-09-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator, or is this a term that you're comfortable with?

SASKIA BOS: I have founded this curatorial course in order to give something to others, to give my knowledge and my experience to others, which for a non-collecting institution such as De Appel is very important: you pass on your experience. That hasn't been possible in the Netherlands, up till let's say, this curatorial course. If you produce - which I think is one of the main functions of a curator - you produce conditions and you help produce artists' work, then you can pass on this knowledge and experience to others and connect people quicker to professionals. After that period they can choose different professions, you do not need to become the curator of another institution, it can be part of a jury, you can become a producer, freelancer for artists' films, so it's so many things you can do with that education.

PON: And when you set up the course in '94, what was the particular reasoning behind that at that particular moment in time, to set up a post-graduate curatorial training programme?

SB: There was no education when I started it. There was only university, art school and the museum, where it would take a long time before you would become the sorcerer's apprentice, so to speak.

In a way that gap between the intellectual training which was available at universities and the practice had to be filled. There was nobody trained for the practice except the few people who were working within a museum directly, which is a slow process. Personally I got my initial 'training' at 'Documenta', when I was asked to assist Rudi Fuchs and his team in '81/82 for editing the catalogues and doing special projects. I received quite some information on how to organise conditions for artists. I was asked to make a big show, the 'Sonsbeek' show in '86, which was really like jumping in the swimming pool, not knowing how to

swim. But I knew a lot of artists and I knew a little bit about how to produce and how to create conditions, but I had not worked inside a museum. At the same time I had already accepted to become the successor of De Appel's founding Director, Wies Smals who unfortunately had died, so from '84 I became also Director of De Appel. I started by finishing projects that had been started by her, which were of a different nature, sometimes more process-based art projects. After that big sculpture show in '86, I knew there was a necessity of finding a different space for art, and I changed the focus of De Appel more or less at the start of the '86 period, and you could call it installation art although I don't like that term. They were exhibitions made by artists, most of the time solo exhibitions, which changed the whole architectural environment through their interventions in that architecture. It was not art in architecture but it was close to it. It was a selection of artists that I presented there who were important for the second half of the eighties and beginning of the nineties, who had their first solo shows in the Netherlands and sometimes also in Europe. I'm talking about Thomas Schütte or Jean Marc Bustamante or Cristina Iglesias in their early days, and people I had also encountered, through my 'Sonsbeek' show, Niek Kemps was an important influence.

PON: You've been practicing for twenty odd years, in the curatorial field, and during that period there's been an unprecedented interest in contemporary art curating. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during that period?

SB: Over the whole twenty years?

PON: Twenty years, maybe you could trace moments, moments of shifts or changes in the practice.

SB: Yea. I remember that when I was just starting, I was critical towards the categories that were used in the early eighties.

There were either heavy painting, expressionist painting and sculpture but there was already this other side, there were Jenny Holzer, Sherrie Levine and Jeff Wall coming from the US and Canada at that time so there was already this critical intellectual analytic view from, let's say the early eighties. They were influencing Europe with its mainly male curators, with whom I was working with at the time, who were not allergic to critical work, but who thought it was a minor movement. They were all very much into art from Germany and new painting from Italy. There was also a second moment for Arte Povera and on the other hand there was the heavy stuff which someone like Baselitz represented and that was for me somewhat of a macho culture. We, as younger critics and curators, found that art nationalistic, or at least nation-based and we didn't see the need for that. So, the first mark that I could make against that was to focus more on critical artists, with a committed way of working and people who were critical also towards architects and towards conventional museum space. Consciousness of space is a legacy of minimal art, but it was taken up in Europe by a younger generation of artists, who then wouldn't work in a site-specific way but more in a site-sensitive way.

If you think about movements in general, there is also '89, an important moment both because of the Berlin wall and of 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', I remember defending that show against others who said how can they do this, this is neo-colonialist, I said no, this is opening up for the rest outside the West. I was very much in favour of Jean Hubert Martin, who as a curator was not accepted because he was from Western Europe and was attacked for being neo-colonialist. The global approach was very much criticised, scrutinised, and there was much irony about that, in the early nineties. We connected to that at De Appel when we moved to the new venue, in 1994. I think you could see that clearly in the choice of artists. We would work with Rirkrit Tiravanija, OK you could say that's a New York artist, but it was a critical position as early as 1996. We had invited Eastern

European artists already in 1989, the year that not only 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' was done, but also the Berlin wall fell and we showed Bulatov, we had Kabakov, the first show of Kabakov in the Netherlands was not at the Stedelijk, it was at De Appel, so we were already moving and opening towards the East, but only in '94,'95, it became a wider focus and we could invite an artist like Huang Yong Ping, who lived in Paris.

So to summarise, let's say that in the early eighties, everything was Western Europe and New York - of LA we weren't really aware and that was called 'Westkunst' by the way, by Kasper König that's the early eighties. In the second half of the eighties, we tried to give it a twist, well maybe a critique, there grew more awareness of architecture and installation art, and then in the early nineties we showed institutional critique with Louise Lawler and Krzysztof Wodiczko, a sort of institutional critique which had already happened but was then focused, we had Mark Dion.

PON: I mean, you mentioned people like Rudi Fuchs and Kasper König who would ultimately have taken the auteur position with the idea of the single author, they represented a kind of autonomy.

SB: The curatorial training programme at De Appel was not so much oriented towards the individual, it was foremost a group process, I mean, there was never one hero, there was never a leader, and they really had to work together: the way they get trained is also to learn to collaborate and to be productive in a team, they have to grapple with each other, they have to argue, to convince one another, to formulate, to get materials on the table. That's the experience that I wanted to hand on, which is an experience every director or curator gets when they function on committees and on juries and where you have to concentrate on the group process, and try to convince others with arguments.

One of the reasons I started this curatorial training, by the way, is also very egotistic, in the sense that I wanted feedback, I

wanted criticism. So we had become one of the few institutions that allowed for criticism within the institution. Call it 'radical chic' or call it whatever you want to call it, but it is still something that sort of keeps you awake as an institution.

PON: Do you think there are dominant forms of curatorial practice, which have emerged since '94?

SB: This group process of curating is not always fantastic, I mean some biennials, some of the 'Whitney Biennials' have been group curated, and it can also be very vague and everybody hides behind the back of somebody else, and nobody takes responsibility. This is the biggest difficulty, and I think if you look like how teams for 'Documenta' have been built, as the last one by Okwui Enwezor, there you see that there is a very good team with clearly somebody steering the boat. With a little group, outside the heat of the sun, I am not so sure that it's necessary, but for a big show like 'Documenta', you will always need one big name, plus a team. I think it's never a democratic tool, but it can be a collaborative tool and it can be generous at the same time.

PON: It is interesting to me that since Okwui Enwezor's 'Johannesburg Biennale', there has been a shift towards a collective form or a multifarious form of curating, particularly of large scale exhibitions like Venice and 'Documenta', but the next 'Documenta' will again be curated by an individual Roger Buergel, and Venice is already being given over to Robert Storr. I'm wondering if you think that that was perhaps a shift away from this collective or multifarious approach to curating such large-scale shows.

SB: The collective has never been able to suppress the idea of the individual, there are flows, but it will never take over, most people are afraid of it and they want to speak to one person, and not to three people. It's a pity because if you see how multifaceted the work is, and if you can work with groups, which I

think I can, you see that you bring out the best in many individuals, and if the team spirit is good, I believe in it. Try to think of the President of your country as a group, it will not be popular, this group will not be elected, although the President may have lots of Secretaries of State and etcetera, so basically you know it is a team, but you always need that one face. With curating you need a clear handwriting, you need a vision, but it can also develop from a group process and if people on that team have different capabilities, the one for the sponsorship, the other has more capacity to talk to artists, the other one is a very good writer, and you form your group and you try to have the same vision and there is no need for hierarchy in the end.

PON: You've been involved in a number of biennials, including the 'Berlin Biennial'.

SB: Yea, which I did with a colleague of mine, I invited him to join me as a co-curator.

PON: How did that experience impact upon your perception of yourself as a curator?

SB: The fact that I worked together with others. It is very important, it's important for direct feedback, it opens up more possibilities, that is if you have the right people around you. It's difficult, you can also choose somebody who's only in for the power, but that's uninteresting. Two years later Ute (Meta Bauer) went far, she went almost beyond recognisable handwriting, here and there you'd see little sub-curated islands, which were maybe somewhat isolated from the rest, that you wondered if they were part of a coherent whole, which I think is a criterion, you want to feel something as a texture, an overall texture of the show.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions or historical precedents or precursors, would you say have been an influence on your curatorial thinking?

SB: No models, I don't believe in abstract theoretical models, but I do believe in trying to develop effective and sensitive answers to given situations. That is, for this situation, at De Appel, given the students, given my own shows here, I do think I have the criteria for it, which is not a model. I think it's important, for example, not to illustrate. A lot of critics who make shows illustrate and maybe it would be better for them to make a book. Then there are people who prefer to make solo shows, which is fine, but if you want to make a group show, there has to be a vision as to why you put these artists together and how you look at your visitor, if you want that vision to be transparent, or if the exhibition should be more like a labyrinth, should be something to explore and to find out later what the underlying ideas are. But a 'theme' that clearly wants to be illustrated is not a workable method for me. When you bring artists together you will have to try to preserve their artistic sphere, to preserve their artistic identity while being presented in a group show, and not to disturb too much and certainly not to pour a kind of sauce over it which makes it easier to swallow, I'm pretty allergic to that. As to criteria for making the 'Berlin Biennial' these were very different than from making shows at De Appel. Content wise, I used terms like 'commitment', 'connectedness', and the third one was 'contribution', because I believed that many artists at that point around 2000, 2001, were talking about the gift and ideas of contributing, giving something to their audience, being generous. Why did I do that? I did this for Berlin because they were not used to that. In Berlin it was always harsh, it was expressionistic, it was tough, it was about the 2nd World War, it was about history, so I wanted to do something else there, bring something quite different.

PON: If you were to describe your individual curatorial practice as distinct from others?

SB: I think I try to analyse, I think I've been influenced by 'institutional critique' myself through artists, the fact that I

try to analyse the conditions, money wise, context wise, politically, and architecturally, and then try to do something which has not been done yet. Which is pretty ambitious, but you should at least strive towards that, and then try to fit it in your budget. But in the end there is no formula, there is not one formula other than being conscious of your context and of your means and of your goal, and the goal could be to do something that hasn' t been done before, which an artist also maybe has as a goal.

PON: Seth Siegelaub used the term 'demystification' in the late sixties in order to clarify the changing role of the relationship between the curator to artist. How relevant do you think this term is still in evaluating contemporary curatorial practice?

SB: Maybe not so much in curatorial practice, well, I think it' s more important for the artist even than for the curator. I think if a curator demystifies it can be so boring, because then there is not much left. If an artist demystifies, it becomes at least a work of art, and it can deconstruct something of a power relation, like Kendell Geers or the 'Crap Shoot' show in 1996 where he was deconstructing the ideological aspects of this building, and what it was worth in economic terms. But if a curator does that, it' s sometimes, you know, like they' re writing a letter or like something, it becomes flat, there is no artistic extra. So I think when artists demystify, they can demystify politics or maybe they can criticise the institution itself, which they did with 'Crap Shoot' , it' s possible. I think it' s never boring when it comes from a good artist. But it can be very boring if a curator does that all the time, because they' re paid by the system, they' re doing it for the system. And then I think, in Holland for example, where everything is always horizontal, a democratic way of liking things, everything is equally interesting and should be accessible to all: then you sometimes do need some mystery, and not demystification. You need some wonders, some spiritual things.

PON: Maybe you think that curating can be a form of artistic practice?

SB: Yes, but in very few cases. I have always defended to have at least one artist-trained curator here on board. We want to be open to accept artists who want to become curators, and in order to do that, we had to forget the degree part. But it was more important for me to accept those people.

PON: I mean, do you think a curated art exhibition can be a work of art?

SB: Well, if you think about the famous Duchamp shows, maybe, the installation itself was also a work of art, yes, certainly, and there are other examples, and there, with the solo show of an artist who curates his own work, where the curator sometimes is merely the facilitator in terms of space and money, there, the installation itself can be a work of art, of course we can speak of it in those terms, because it's sometimes hard to distinguish between presentation, display and work. It all depends who you're talking about. If you're talking about Bruce Nauman, where do you distinguish presentation and the content, it sort of goes together in a way. And no curator is there to tell him how to do it, only he will, and there are other people who are so conscious of space and of the psychological impact of space, that if that is the focus of that artist, it sort of melts and that is the total artwork. So you get a gesamtkunstwerk within one solo show - it encompasses the whole building, sound and colours, visual.

PON: In *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls an art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative display practices of the past. Do you think that this amnesia ultimately has impacted upon our current perception of contemporary art curating?

SB: Yes, and there will always be amnesia. But that's not only

within the practice of curation, there are so many artists who don't even want to know what other artists have done, there's lots of amnesia there too, which is about not wanting to know. Thinking they would be less limited, less hindered in their personal development, that they will be freer to make their work. Whereas being aware and then making tabula rasa is, I think, what you need to do.

PON: Do you think there are current projects or curatorial initiatives that are attempting to deal with that amnesia?

SB: I'm sure there are; there probably is a whole list! In this field I am sure our students work on that too, because they sort of cross-fertilise from the art historical point of view, and coming from all these different countries we get specialists from different areas of the world, in the sense that if you meet a curator from Japan who is knowledgeable about Thailand and Indonesia, that will inform a curator coming from Canada or from Norway, who doesn't know anything about Asia and gets to know this here in Amsterdam. So it's not only history and amnesia, it's also all the unknown patches on the global map.

PON: One of the things that when I was here last, and I went through the archives next door I discovered a document, which gave a list of the key exhibitions which that year I assumed that the students were actually researching and there was some from 'Sonsbeek' '86 and 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', 'Les Immateriaux' and 'Documenta 5'.

SB: I know that was a course that Mark Kremer gave, it was a course, and it was about the role of the artist within a show. So what was the role of Daniel Buren in 'Documenta 5'? And then they had to research through the catalogue, to formulate what the position was of the artist in relation to the curator.

PON: What interested me in it was that there was, it seemed just

from a cursory look at the documents, that there was an attempt at looking at that repressed history if you like.

SB: Exactly. From the viewpoint of the artist, and that was very refreshing, yes.

PON: And the term 'performative' curating was used by Katrina Schlieben, Søren Grammel and Maria Lind who used the term as a testing site in the Kunstverein in Munich. This term they used to describe a self-reflexive curatorial practice associated with a certain curatorial strategy, do you think that 'perfomativity' is a useful term or curatorial performance?

SB: Not for me, but first of all I haven't read their analysis, so I don't know what their ideological description or interpretation of that performativity in curation is, and I could react on it if I had. Personally I'm maybe even 'anti-performative curating', I think that in my teachings or in my discussions with the students, which are more discussions than teachings, I try to make them conscious of the fact that it's on the artist and the work of art, the vision of the art development that they should focus, and not so much on themselves as curators. Now this is probably not what you mean by performative curating, but I think if anybody should perform, it's the artist and not the curator. Only if you're very talented, like the late Harald Szeemann was, you can call that curating maybe performative, because there is so much fantasy and inspiration involved from a literary and historical nature. He was somebody very special and that person for me is beyond categorisation and his method should also not be copied, I think.

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is, and how would you describe a good curated art exhibition?

SB: When form and content are coherent throughout the exhibition - and obviously there can be very many different forms that artists use - but if you can feel the coherence while moving through the

rooms and in the diversity of its formal presentation, there should be a coherent point of view. It's very difficult to analyse because you cannot only analyse it with logical tools, it's also very much your own sensitivity, which every viewer has for himself, but in our job, I think we have to develop that sensitivity and try to verbalise that as well.

PON: One of the points that Lynne Cooke made when I interviewed her in New York was that because of the emergence of the dominance of the biennial type large scale exhibitions, other formats of large scale exhibitions like 'Westkunst' or 'Von Hier Aus' are no longer becoming produced because of the dominance of the biennial model, do you think we need any more international biennials?

SB: In some areas they are in need of that in order to be on the map. The big discussion about Berlin was with René Block, who said Berlin doesn't need a biennial; Berlin would need a yearly big fantastic show about a certain theme that brings people to town but not a biennial. And then the young artists said no, we also need a biennial, because all these big shows are always imported and that's the old West Berlin, the biennial will bring out the New Berlin because it will also stimulate the local and the really contemporary.

PON: De Appel is one of the leading international post-graduate training programmes. What are its current objectives and have those objectives changed since 1994, and do you think that we need any more post-graduate curatorial training programmes?

SB: To answer your last question first, I do think we need more, because there do not exist so many. The question is, if this specific formula I developed should go on forever, and now that will be not under my leadership anymore, as I am going to lead the Cooper Union art school in New York. De Appel's budget and conditions do not really allow for doing large projects in the city, it would be nice to connect with more than just this place

and different groups of students have tried to break out of this institution, but it's not so easy within the seven months to make such relationships happen and to get funding for it as well.

PON: OK, and just one more question. One of the things that I recognised within contemporary curatorial discourse, particularly within recent publications, there is a tension between the semi-autonomous position of the so called freelancer, so called independent curator and that of the curator working within an institution. Do you think that those two activities are impossible to merge together?

SB: No, you see it happen here, they are merging. I'm not saying I give carte blanche, but freelance curators are encouraged to come and do something very different than what I present in this same building, so there is the institutional curator, and there are guest curators who get invited here, who can be freelance or also people who work as a director in another city, like Moderna Galerija where Zdenka Badovinac did a show at De Appel where she focused on the specific situation of being a guest and what that meant. Hou Hanru and Vasif Kortun also worked within that series called 'Unlimited NL'. So some of them are freelance, others are related to institutions. I must say I didn't really see the difference, because they were not about power relationships: if I invite, as De Appel Director, my colleague from Moderna Galleria Ljubljana, and she accepts, nobody will think of power, because there is not so much money involved and everybody knows that and feels that, which also gives much more freedom.

PON: Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE

NICOLAS BOURRIAUD

Paris, 27-01-04

PAUL O'NEILL: Can you tell me about the interdependent relationship between your practice as a critic and curator?

NICOLAS BOURRIAUD: Well that's a huge story. Maybe, the specificity of my work is I never drew a line between the activity of art critic and that of the curator. The exhibition comes out of the theoretical work and the theoretical work also comes from the exhibition, in a way. Something very important about this relationship between curatorial activity and theoretical activity is that none of my exhibitions have ever illustrated a theme. It is not an illustrative show, because the temptation of many theoreticians would be to illustrate one idea with artworks. According to me, this process would obligatorily unload every artwork exhibited somehow. So even 'Traffic', which linked to *Relational Aesthetics* in '96, was not an illustration but a verification, through many of the artists that I was interested in, of this theory and something which was much more articulate and much more loose than a relationship between a theory and one practice. That is very important actually, because exhibiting is a vocabulary and writing in this place has a totally different vocabulary. It's like speaking two languages actually. The show is a language and writing is a language. I never confounded the two, but I need the first one to do the second one all the time. That is maybe the basis of my curatorial practice.

PON: Has that position shifted in terms of the production of the exhibition, since you have began working at an institution such as Palais Tokyo, where there is a certain programme that has to be maintained and there is a time frame on a project?

NB: Sure, the position of the co-Director of Palais Tokyo is very different than that of the curator. I am not a curator here somehow. Sometimes, I curate mainly group shows like 'GNS [Global Navigation Systems]' last year, or 'Playlist' next month, because I have to cover a field which is much broader than my own theories, firstly I am working with someone else, who is my associate Jerôme [Sans] and two, because curating is one moment of my work here and many of the shows are curated by members of the staff here for example and it is really important for us to have a team activity which is a group activity, a collective activity, even if the exhibitions are decided mainly by

Jerôme and I. So sometimes I curate a show, once a year, which is a group show, and which is a progression of my agenda, in a way. For example, the next show I am doing 'Playlist', is directly coming from the 'GNS' show which is directly coming from a show I did in '99, which was called 'Le Capital'. I would say that I have three construction sites, in a way. First one being *Relational Aesthetics* which gave 'Joint Ventures' in New York in '96 at Basilico Gallery, which gave also 'Touch' in San Francisco in 2002 and some others like 'Contact' in Switzerland. The second one is a reflection on production, what is producing the work today? The ideas I have for the moment are mainly expressed in a book I wrote called *Postproduction*. I am still exploring this field, and in a way 'Playlist' is exploring this field and a few shows I did like the show I did in Italy in 2001 started exploring this field. And the third one would be the construction site of representation and what is an image today? How are images functioning in society? These shows were 'Le Capital' and 'GNS'. So there are many close links between one show and another. It is not one idea plus one idea. I am very systematic, but wanting to be surprised, all the time ready to shift from one position to another.

PON: In a recent article by Alex Farquharson on curating he suggested that within some of the ideas inherent within both *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction*, there was brevity to your neo-logistic tendencies. Is this a desire to create a particular kind of language around a particular type of practice that you are interested in or to create a vocabulary that doesn't actually already exist?

NB: In *Relational Aesthetics* for example, I published a kind of glossary at the end of the book and I am still working on it. For example, the idea of semionaut is a concept I am working on for the next show 'Playlist' from semeiosis; the sign and nautos; navigation… the idea of postproduction also... I think I have to invent or to recycle one word or one term for each concept that I am working on, as a philosopher and a theoretician in art I have to invent concepts, grids to read the landscape of art. If you don't invent your own language then you are just bludgeoning on someone else's vocabulary and that doesn't get you far enough, so you have to invent terms all the time, to go forward.

PON: In a similar way to Derrida's notion of 'Positions', and the idea of occupying alternative positions each time in order to occupy a unique position, one has to create a new etymology almost?

NB: I also believe very much in the idea of Louis Althshuler, that philosophy of ideas is like what Emmanuel Kant said, 'a battlefield'. In this battlefield, you have to occupy positions; it is very close to Derrida's idea and in order to occupy positions you have to invent your tools, your battery of guns, and Big Bertha's.

PON: Is *Postproduction*, in a way, an updating of one of Frederick Jameson's ideas of postmodernism as a proliferation of images, whereas *Postproduction*, suggests a proliferation of forms?

NB: That is the background of it, where the notion of postproduction, can grow out of, that is not the fact in itself that is the background. This chaotic proliferation of cultural products is the reason why such a thing as postproduction has become the norm but it is not the fact in itself. That is very interesting because it also raises issues like this proliferation actually, a kind of overpopulation of cultural signs, and what we have to deal with. That is very interesting, because the core of the curatorial job is to select signs, to select objects and artists, so is there a difference between Seth Siegelaub working in '65 with a very reduced area or landscape of artists and us, who are working in a proliferating landscape of artists, popping up every week. It is very different and we have to cope with it, to address it somehow. I am mainly working with, more or less, the same artists all the time, adding a few ones each time when I can. I am trying to stay with a kind of skeleton of a body of artists in a way, who I am really working with and I follow the work of, but all the time being as curious as possible to the newcomers. That is very difficult.

PON: Is that a critical position in relation to the curator as global flâneur?

NB: Sure, because when you are travelling a lot, like I do, you are confronted with a huge list of artists. You go to Korea or then Moscow etc, you discover a totally different situation, which are sometimes

very closed in themselves and including many artists as granted that you have never heard of, and it is the same even in London or Paris. You have to be a capital foreigner, I try to be a foreigner in my own country and that is the only way I can live here is being a foreigner.

PON: I recently organised a conference at the Serpentine Gallery, London which was titled; 'The Curator as DJ?' and there were two conflicting resolutions during the day. One position was that there is a kind of positivity within the remix about a lack of end forms; there being no absolute truth if you like, no absolute material outcome, the idea of an exhibition as a constant regeneration, mixing and remixing of cultural forms. This also has an egalitarian aspect to it. On another level there was an argument that a kind of responsibility needs to be articulated from the outset as to why these forms have been selected by the curator. This point was made mainly in relation to the ever-presence of certain artists and curators in the biennial circuit. How would you position yourself in relation to these two points?

NB: There are several points actually. The first one being that a good artwork, in my eyes, can be shown in many different positions actually. That is one of the interests of the curatorial job, to provide grids of reading, reading grids of artworks and you can only do it through installing in different contexts and also a biennial or any exhibition can be a different context for an artwork. I think there is no problem in it fundamentally. The problem comes from the fact that if you are just re-showing all the same artists as a kind of authority criterion then it becomes a problem. You have to show artworks for good reasons, which is the main problem I can see out of it. Many times art works: the top fifty art-list comes just because it has to be that way. There is no question asked. There are many top fifty artists who I will never work with, because I am just not interested in their work, that's all. And there are many who are totally unknown who I really believe in. That is the main criterion I think. The problem does not come from the recycling or the recurrence of artist names, it comes from the why they are shown.

PON: What is quite interesting is also the current recycling of *Relational Aesthetics*. It has become almost new territory again since

it was published in English, six years after it was published in French, particularly within the field of curating and the discourse around the group of artists whose work you were dealing with. Is there a difference between the moment you first published it and it's current reception?

NB: Absolutely, the fact is the first text about it was first published in '95 in *Documents*, in French and English actually, but it was still very confidential. Then there was a text in English published in *Cream 1* and a few extracts published in Italian and Spanish, so it kind of ran that way, but still on a very small scale of audience. Then of course when it was published in English, then in Danish, then in Turkish, it was really like a plague, a huge spread. Then it changed a lot, because these texts were written in order to understand the common point between an already existing group of artists who were working together, who were collaborating together and the names were twenty five, not more actually. Then of course, five or six years later it created a kind of new wave of artists that I never worked with...you know...It was very interesting because there are many artists busting themselves to put into this movement, which are totally beyond my control and sometimes I don't like the work of. But, that's all right it was made for that. It's a toolbox and a toolbox you take one tool and you use it as you like, it is important to have a generous position on it actually, it is not something that's my property, it is an idea that I developed so people use it as they want. So it doesn't matter if I like or not the artist who now, a few years later, include themselves in this way. It doesn't bother me.

PON: The recent show by the curating students at the Royal College of Art, 'The Straight or Crooked Way', seemed to conflate both your writings in *Relational Aesthetics* and *Postproduction* as a kind of critique. Were you aware of the show?

NB: No I wasn't aware of it, but it is true. It is interesting because *Relational Aesthetics* describes the general social substrate, which was appearing in the nineties, the kind of psychological frame let's say, which was obviously rising at this time. *Postproduction* is not the book that talks about the same level of reality somehow. It's only about how artists produce their work. It is very different. One is on

the sociological level, and the second being at a kind of purely aesthetic level. It is slightly different. You see what I mean. I don't know whether I am making myself clear. There are two different angles on the same situation. And I am talking, more or less, about the same artists and I really wanted to, just to show that is was two different spotlights, two different grids on the same reality, and the same landscape of artists actually, which were, more or less, the same ones I have been working with in the last ten years, from Pierre Huyghe to Maurizio Cattelan, Liam Gillick etc. etc. and I am talking about the same artists in the two books that might make people think about it. It cannot be antagonistic because it is not the same level of understanding.

PON: The idea of the 'fold' seems to be very evident for me, within *Relational Aesthetics*, it is between the spectator or the reader and the work and within *Postproduction*, it is the meeting point or fold between two forms?

NB: It is also a kind of apology of the reader. It is an apology of what I call 'the culture of activity', as opposed to the 'culture of passivity', which is the mainstream culture and the two books have many common points. I never did this work, but I could do it somehow. And they are also just two different sets with the same action - maybe this metaphor might be a bit more clear, two different décor.

PON: Both of these publications are, in a sense, curatorial projects?

NB: Yes, and they are curatorial wells for me actually because I work from these books when I curate a show most of the time, not all the time. They are like two construction sites, which are not over yet for me. It still has to evolve. I am also working on new things because every show makes me go a little further. 'GNS', for example, brought me the idea of cartography, which was very interesting for me, and raised a new set of problems, which I will develop certainly in my next ones.

PON: Do you think it is important to be involved in curatorial composites within the exhibition as much as the curatorial composites within the writing and vice versa?

NB: I am exactly in the position of somebody who is writing screenplays and being a director, a movie director. It is more or less the same, writing novels and being a director. Of course, he or she uses them: his or her writings, but also makes very different things. It is not the same work somehow, but I am lucky enough to be able to do both.

PON: The curator Rudi Fuchs said that one of the most important things for a curator was his or her writing, but it appears to me that in the last ten to fifteen years, curators may have forgotten the role of writing within their practice?

NB: I think so, but that's a problem because most of the time the figure of the curator is not, he or she is not supposed to...how would I put it? The main problem is that some people might think that an exhibition is not a 'speech act', which is absolutely unbelievable to my eyes. If this is a 'speech act', and it is obviously, it's a language that articulates signs together, then it needs to be thought about and then it can be the core of a thought. It is a language and has to be analysed as a language, exactly like a book except it is not the same language, that's all. I never confound the two.

PON: If the activity of the performance of that spoken act is in language, 'I curate', when you say 'I curate', within the production of an exhibition, how close do you see the relationship between the spoken and the subsequent activity?

NB: Well, the curator has to establish this closeness or this distance actually. There is not a formula that would be worthwhile for everybody. Anybody has to establish his or her own language actually. That is the way I would put it; you cannot sum it up with a formula. It is up to the curator to decide the degree of reflexivity, the degree of philosophy that is included in the exhibition.

PON: You asked me a question earlier, which I would like to ask you. What do you think are the most recent developments within curatorial practice?

NB: Well, there are good things and bad things. Let's start with the good ones. What I see is the development of this idea of the group exhibition as a language and of course then, indirectly the bigger and the more important aspects in any exhibition, even a solo show, is decoded in the same way. For example, for the generation at the beginning of the nineties, the shows like that of Collins and Milazzo, in New York in the eighties, were important because they gave new possibilities for the artist, by including many heterogeneous artworks in the same space. It was important because it introduced a new sensibility in a way. This is one of the good points, that the language of 'the group show' has also influenced the practice of the artists and this is something interesting, because you see now many artists including other artist's works in their exhibitions, which is not infrequent, and how to accommodate with the diverse would be something that is quite recent. Of course, there would be roots of it in the eighties, seventies or sixties, but mainly it hadn't come to a more general audience until more recently. Bad things might be, for example, I am always very sceptical about shows like 'Utopia Station', in Venice last year and the whole of the 'Venice Biennale', 2003 actually, I have to say, because 'Utopia Station', was maybe the best part of it, but after the curator as artist, or meta-artist that Harald Szeemann was really embodying, we see at the moment a kind of drift to this idea of the curator as a manager, like Francesco Bonami is really embodying actually. I think that this is really negative; it is a kind of marketing based idea of the curator, which I think is totally wrong position for many reasons. And that ended with this very bad and uninteresting 'Venice Biennale' that we all thought actually. One of the problematic points with the 'Utopia Station' exhibition, which was a kind of huge summing up of the ideas of the nineties in a way, was that it had no perspective. I would say that utopia is a dead end as a concept for art, because it is a kind of Indian reserve that is limiting the artist's work more than expanding the field of art. I am quite negative about it. I think that is a dead end and that frightens me in a way. There was a kind of anonymity of the artwork. The artworks were not presented and optimised, but just introduced as names and signs in the huge mess of artworks, where of course there is no artist who is coming to the fore in this show and so the curator's position is much more important in this show. I am not going that far actually. The problem is not whether or not you are an author as a

curator, but which kind of author you are. It is a totally different thing. It is not about vindicating or claiming to be an author or not, because I think the curator is an author, but the problem is, which kind of author? And in 'Utopia Station' you had this idea that the general situation was much more important than any of the individual works that were present in the show. You couldn't read any individual position actually in this show. You could say that this decision was taken for good reasons, like creating a very collective frame and relating the individualism into a collective dream. That's ok; this point was made many times in the nineties. It is not something new, but more like the end of something.

PON: Was there not a contradiction between being both stationary and utopian which was probably implicit and complicit within the curatorial expression or statement, and to curate a show with the term utopia, during a time of a speeding up of globalised history in the last few years, but there is a kind of de-historicisation of the notion of utopia?

NB: It is the naturalisation of this concept as the core and nature of art, which is what bothers me. It is not the nature of art but it is an insurrection, which is of course coming many times in history but which has to be historicised. What is the nature of this utopian thinking today? This was not discussed at all in this exhibition, like if it was naturalised and it is cultural, it is not natural. I don't believe in utopia as the nature of art because then it will block the idea of art and close it into a very specific field, which is not interesting, which is kind of political innocuousness.

PON: It also empties out the notion of utopia as an historical construct, and empties it out of its plurality of subjectivities?

NB: In *Relational Aesthetics*, I developed a concept of 'micro-utopia', which was in a way exactly opposite to the idea of utopia displayed within 'Utopia Station', which was the idea that utopia has to take a place somewhere, which was a kind of a game on the very word 'utopia'. A 'micro-utopia' is something which is very concrete actually. It takes place in the 'here and now'. It has to happen here and now and I was really interested in many works by Pierre Huyghe, Maurizio

Cattelan and Philippe Parreno for the very same reason, because it was not an abstract model of utopia. It was a very concrete way to establish alternative propositions, but in a very concrete context. I am more working within this field than the very abstract and general idea of utopia.

PON: A criticism I had of 'Utopia Station', was its lack of respect for the viewer and its idea of participation or inter-activity was 'mice on a conveyor-belt?'

NB: It is the same disease in a way, because it's the very abstract idea of participation. The most important thing was not that the beholder or the viewer was participating, it was in how he or she was participating, it was about the possibility of participation and I think that this is a distortion of the concept, which gives to the participation a kind of aesthetic value in itself that it does not have. You have very interesting artists working out of participation and very uninteresting ones. That is something, which has to be clear. It was, more or less, erasing every detail of the works.

PON: If you were given the option of curating a biennial, such as Venice and considering the temporal restrictions and so on, what would you do?

NB: I would say that I would work with less artists and hope that I would be given enough time to develop important projects with every artist and not only a display of works. I would try to address very specific problematics through this exhibition, and not just use a kind of vague slogan like 'Dictatorship of the Viewer', which was absolutely not treated in the show. I have to say. It is a slogan like: 'Just Do It', or 'Think Different'.

PON: You mentioned the idea of curator as manager, does there appear to be a confusing trend with the notion of curator as manager, like with Venice and also with 'Documenta 11', which although very different projects had a director working with many other curators?

NB: There is a kind of confusion between big and great at the moment. That would be my only comment.

PON: As I am looking at the development of curating as a practice since the late eighties, what impact would you say that post-graduate curating courses have had on curating as a professional practice and also as a potential career?

NB: I am not really able to judge about, but as far as I know, it has developed a critical consciousness upon the notion of exhibition, which is a very positive thing.

PON: Liam Gillick wrote an article for *Art Monthly* in 1992 about how significant Le Magasin in Grenoble was on many artists and curators when it opened in 1987, but one of his fears was that with the increase in such courses that we would end up with finishing schools for art dealers, failed artists, collectors etc. What would you think?

NB: If it was the only washing machine in the art world, I would agree, but there are so many washing machines in the art world. These kinds of programmes are not the only guilty ones. I would say that the good thing with this extreme flexibility and a kind of process of theorising the borders between artistic activity and curatorial activity and dealers etc. etc., the borders are blurred more and more. It allows the shift from one place to another and that is a good thing, but it also permits some people to not get caught in a way. Now it's more a question of individuals, that's what I mean, whatever the activities are. That's mainly a good thing, but the fact is there are as many boring and uninteresting artists as curators. That is the result now.

PON: There is a very close relationship between criticism and curation within your practice, would you say you take a responsible position for this interdependency?

NB: That is why I prefer to disagree with Hans Ulrich [Obrist] than to agree with many people who are mediocre. There are many interesting curators who I don't agree with at all, but that's all right because they are respectable because they provide a grid that is personal and they have a very personal activity. They have a very personal point of

view on the arts. I agree with many things with Hans Ulrich and I disagree with him on many things too, but I respect him for both.

PON: Is there a difference in responsibility between your practices? Hans Ulrich's curatorial methodology often involves the production of repositories of conflicting information or knowledge where there isn't a beginning, middle or end point to that repository. It is something that is available to the user, reader, flexible, etc., but whereas your curatorial position is more obviously about a much closer relationship between criticism, curation and production, but also in clarifying or defining your position from the outset?

NB: What I am interested in the curatorial field are questions of style. Style exactly the way that Gilles Deleuze defined it: style as the movement of a thought. It is a matter of style and the most important thing is to have style of your own, whatever it is and that is already a beginning. I am not talking about style in a shallow way, but really as the frame of a thought, the visual or formal thought on art, which is the language of exhibition, articulating the formal and the intellectual in a way.

PON: Is that a suggestion of a difference between the notion of 'doing something' and trying to 'do everything', in terms of style?

NB: Absolutely, I gave up very early the idea of being at the centre of everything and trying to recycle everything that is going on. I am not referring to the art world as an actuality, but as a stream that is like coffee percolation. The time in art is percolating, there is no fluid stream, some places take much time to pass and others are very quick and fast. So the time we are dealing with as curators is a totally different time than the journalist for example. That is a very big difference and again I am referring to and concerning to my work. I am referring to this notion of time as a percolating time.

END OF TAPE

AA BRONSON

New York, 28-05-04

PAUL O'NEILL: Maybe we could start by tracing the beginning of the history of General Idea?

AA BRONSON: General Idea happened by accident. It was the late sixties in Toronto and our friend Mimi, who was Felix's girlfriend, found this old house, 78 Gerrard Street West, and convinced us to move in together to save rent. There were about eight of us and we were all more or less straight out of school. We moved into the house and it was a house that at one point had been turned into a shop. It was the late sixties, there were flowers painted on the street, it was the pop sixties era, and now the street had more or less died down and the action had moved to some other part of town. We moved into this rather forlorn house, which had a store window punched into the living room; we were all unemployed, mostly artists, and we were a little bored. We began rummaging through the garbage on the street of the various neighbouring businesses, and we began to assemble fake stores in our store window. We did window displays essentially. We didn't think of it as art at the time, we were just entertaining ourselves. Sometimes, the displays got out of hand. We would have to give up our living room to them; we did immense displays that took up the entire ground floor. There was usually a little sign on the door that said 'back in 5 minutes'. It was really Felix, Jorge and I, who involved ourselves in these projects, the three of us, and I think that's how we developed our collaborative venture. Our activity together became, in a way, a critique of consumerism because the material consisted of the dregs of consumerism and the venue had the outer aspect of a store. It didn't really occur to us to think of it as a gallery. We just thought of it as a store. I think today in a similar situation, in the East Village, somebody inhabiting a store would be more likely to open up a gallery there. However, we started doing these…[Doorbell rings]. It's funny, I have told this story so many times, and when you tell it many times it starts to narrow down to a particular narrative. But as I am telling it this time I am thinking of all the loose ends that tend to get lost, they are sort of illuminated today in particular ways, but I won't get into too many of them.

Felix was trained as a painter. Jorge and I were trained as architects. Jorge had also studied acting and had experience as a filmmaker, he actually made his money working as a cinematographer. At

the time we first met, I was working for a theatre, doing graphics and some stage design and so on. We started to do performances, one-night performances, happening-like sort of things, usually in a theatre context because we knew a lot of theatre people. We would involve friends and so on, but there were always the three of us in the centre.

We were only in that house for a year and an amazing amount happened in that year. Towards the end of that year we began to do something that could be called exhibitions, right in the storefront. For example, we purchased the entire contents of a women's dress shop that had been closed since 1948, everything, the mannequins, and the entire inventory. We recreated the store in our storefront, with everything actually for sale, and we called it 'Betty's'. That was probably one of the first projects that we really thought of as an artwork as opposed to just entertaining ourselves. We got the front page, a full-page article, in what was then called the 'Women's Section' in the national newspaper, but as a fashion article. You know this was the very early 1970s, it was really before the whole idea of retro, and before used clothing had any cultural position, really before any of that had actually happened. It was on the cutting edge of that wave of interest in recycling clothing and culture. Anyway, that's how we began and we very quickly got a sort of reputation around Toronto. We traveled everywhere in a big gang and although it was the tail end of the hippie era, we were always more on the glamour side of things, and we quickly became a fixture around Toronto.

Paul O'Neill: You were called General Idea at this stage?

AA Bronson: We called ourselves General Idea for the first time in June 1970. We were invited to be in our first real art exhibition, a group show of conceptual art at the Nightingale Art Gallery, which later became A Space. There were a few Americans in the show like Vito Acconci and Dennis Oppenheim and then mostly Toronto artists. Actually the project we developed for that exhibition was called 'General Idea' and somehow the name glommed onto us, it stuck from then on.

In our first few years together we had a big interest in collaboration and in pulling other people into all our various projects as

collaborators. Some of these projects took the form of something more akin to group exhibitions, but self-organised, not organised through a gallery. Others were more innovative, and took other forms. In 1972, *FILE Megazine* really came out of that sort of activity. We had this idea of doing some sort of magazine, that bypassed the normal art press. Rather than creating value for art by recognising it in the magazine, *FILE* was more about artists themselves, creating some sort of mythology as much as anything. We published *FILE* until 1989 and it went through various shifts over the years. Towards the end it became much more institutionalised, in the sense that it was more like we were commissioning artist's projects for the magazine. This was a more conventional but also more manageable approach frankly, because at the beginning *FILE* was so freeform and so collaborative that it really took over our lives completely.

Paul O'Neill: The origins of *FILE Megazine* came out of your interest in and participation within a mail art community, but also an interest in consumer-culture-appropriation?

AA Bronson: Yes, we were quite involved in the beginnings of mail art, and would begin every day around a big table, talking, drinking coffee and opening the mail, which was substantial. We received mail from all over North America, Europe, Eastern Europe, South America, Japan, Australia and occasionally even India. Mail came from Gilbert and George, Joseph Beuys, Warhol's Factory, Ray Johnson, various Fluxus artists, and so on. At a certain point we realised that we were building an enormous backlog of material, and, in an effort to share it with other artists, we began *FILE Megazine*, which we saw as a kind of link between artists, much like mail art itself. We designed *FILE* to look like *LIFE* because we wanted it to act as a kind of parasite within the magazine distribution system. We knew that if it looked familiar, people would pick it up, and they did. We thought of it as a kind of virus within the communication systems, a concept that William Burroughs had written about in the early sixties. (He once told me that he considered Kodak's signature yellow to be a kind of virus).

Paul O'Neill: What were the terms of discourse that General Idea used at the time to configure what they were doing? Would you have thought of yourselves as an artists' group, a collective or a self-

organisation?

AA Bronson: We thought of ourselves as an artists' group and it's interesting because now almost anybody who writes about us calls us an artists' collective. We never thought of ourselves as a collective, because we really modeled ourselves on the idea of a rock band. We wanted to be the Rolling Stones of the art world or something like that. We thought of ourselves in really pragmatic terms as a group. I think if any of us had played instruments we would have formed a proper group and I think that's an interesting model, you know the model of a rock band, and it's a model that's not really used in the art world. So we didn't think of ourselves as a collective.

On the other hand we all came out of a sort of sixties era, particularly me. I came from an 'alternative' background; with a group of other people I had founded a commune, an underground newspaper, a free school, and so on. So in particular I had a very developed philosophy that involved horizontal structure, inclusion and consensus, that sort of thing, and that became the foundation of General Idea. We always made decisions by consensus: if anybody was unsure about something, we would just not do it. That meant that we always had a lot of ideas, as we used to say, that were on the shelf, ideas that remained undeveloped. We would pick them up sometimes two years later, five years later, ten years later, when everything had changed or we had some other perspective on what the idea was, and we would pick it up and continue, or knit the idea into some other project we were doing. Everything was very freeform, but very idealistic at the same time.

Because we were so ironic, in Canada we were seen as not being really serious. Also people would tell us that you can't be a group and be an artist, artists don't work in groups. But when we went to Europe, we had our first show in Europe in '76 we were very quickly picked up and written about in political terms, Marxist terms, because we operated as a group, because we operated by consensus, because of the critical intent inherent in the work, and I think to a certain extent because of the sexual aspect: that we were, if not clearly gay, at least sexually ambiguous. Well, we were taken very seriously especially in Switzerland, Austria and Italy, which were the first three countries

that really embraced us, and then Holland. And that allowed us to see ourselves through a critical discourse other than the one that we had developed as our own private language. That was really interesting to us, and also that meant that people back in North America read some of that and got some other idea about us than the one they had before. So our careers shifted quite dramatically once we started to show in Europe.

Paul O'Neill: Was this critical discourse something that you took on board and introduced as part of your practice?

AA Bronson: I don't think so, I mean our earliest influences were the International Situationists, and we were also influenced a lot by literary sources, oddly enough, and in particular William Burroughs. The idea, for example, of an 'image virus', of an image being able to travel in culture like a virus, is taken directly from Burroughs' writings from the late fifties and early sixties. I would say William Burroughs, the International Situationists, Marshall McLuhan, Gertrude Stein and Claude Levi-Strauss were our chief influences at the time. In particular, we were very interested in anthropological writing and trying to apply it to our relationship with each other, and to our specific culture, trying to imagine ourselves as not actually embedded in the culture but as anthropologists in North America. So all the work that we did that referred to culture, like the early issues of *File Megazine* looking like *Life* magazine and so on, all of that was part of this idea of ourselves as cultural anthropologists.

Paul O'Neill: Anthropology suggests the idea of studying things that already exist in the social world and has political currency within the curatorial field, particularly in relation to post-colonial museological discourses and ideas of collecting cultural knowledge. Would you have thought of it in those terms, is there a connection between anthropology, curating and General Idea?

AA Bronson: Absolutely. We called ourselves cultural anthropologists. We really did have a global worldview, I think, and looked upon the common curatorial model as a kind of primitive ritualised activity.

An aspect of being in Toronto in the late sixties and early seventies

was that there was no real art world; the art world didn't have anything to offer us. The museums all looked totally boring to us. The few art galleries there were, seemed on the whole, pretty uninteresting. The generation of artists that were older than us seemed totally boring to us and we just had no interest in the art world. The audience that we developed was culled from other audiences, from a new music audience, a rock and roll audience, a small press writing audience, and the trendy design crowd. We pulled in those audiences and made them our audience. We didn't really have any interest in a traditional art world way of doing things, so the anthropological view that we embraced was very clear to us. It also meant that we didn't care about exhibiting in a gallery or not. We published a text, I think in '75, in *FILE Megazine*, in which we talked about the gallery as a sort of showroom, like when you have a car you like to go and drive around in it right on the streets, but it's also nice now and then to put it in the showroom and have it on display, but obviously the primary activity for a car is to be driven on the streets and you drive it around. That was our approach to making art; the gallery context was ok but it wasn't the be-all and end-all of what we did. I am not sure whether I have answered your question or not.

Paul O'Neill: Obviously another aspect of what differentiates, in traditional terms, the location of the production of art, the position of the artist and curator, is the involvement of others. This is one reason why many artist collectives or collaborative groups are discussed about in curatorial terms, merely by the fact that there is more than one person producing the work. Is that something that General Idea would have discussed? As an artists' group, you are working with each other's ideas, which is a form of curatorial practice?

AA Bronson: That's very true. The interesting thing about working over such a long period of time, 25 years, was that in the process of constant conversation, we would meet over morning coffee and there was always three hours of talk, that is how the day started, and as those ideas circulated between us and as the ideas built up, a sort of group language started to evolve. And then as we built that up even further, after about seven years of collaboration, it became a group mind. It

is like people who have been married for years and start to finish each other's sentences and know each other's thoughts. Something very different starts to happen. It reaches a totally different level. In the beginning, for the first few years and even once the group language emerged, there was definitely a curatorial aspect. Partly because we were very aware of our audience and of the kind of venues that we might be able to get access to, and because we didn't have access to normal venues, we were discussing the sort of issues that a curatorial team might discuss. In fact I think that's true, maybe even towards the end as well, but we were operating much more as a single unit after the first seven or eight years.

Paul O'Neill: Did you organise exhibitions with other artists or other artists' groups?

AA Bronson: First of all, *FILE Megazine* was a bit like that. Every issue was like an exhibition and then after publishing that for two years (*FILE* began in 1972), artists started sending us stuff. And it was in an era when a lot of artists were publishing ephemera and books and all of that, and we started to build up a collection, boxes and boxes of stuff. So when we founded Art Metropole in '74, there was a two-pronged intention. One idea was to set up a formal archive of this material, and the other was to access the distribution system that we had set up with *File Megazine* to other artists, by selling their products. In that sense, both the collection and the archive, on one hand, and the shop in the other hand, both operated as loose, exhibition-like venues. And then at a certain point we started actually presenting exhibitions at Art Metropole.

The other thing was that we, or more often, I, would get invited to make proposals to curate exhibitions in other places. So I curated a series of exhibitions in Toronto in the mid seventies for an early artist-run gallery called A Space, notably an exhibition of multiples by Joseph Beuys. A Space is still there today, one of many. Later I did an exhibition about artist-generated activity in Canada since the post-war period for the Power Plant. It was an exhibition in which I invited artists and collaboratives to produce works, which could operate together as a sort of landscape. I thought of it as a sort of landscape in the gallery. The works together became a sort of

landscape that was descriptive of a period in Canada's cultural history. The funny thing about me being the curator, of course, was that Jorge, Felix and I would discuss those exhibitions at our morning meetings at General Idea. In fact for me to attach my name to them was sort of weird, they were to a large extent – even though I was the one who would be the front man and do the administrative work – projects that came out of the group as a whole.

Paul O'Neill: Is that something General Idea would have discussed as a problematic condition?

AA Bronson: Well, we did discuss it, and Jorge and Felix were quite eager to not have their names on it because they didn't want to deal with the hassle from any of the administration [laughs] and they had no desire to be formally involved at all. Similar things would happen at Art Metropole. For example we did an exhibition and a book called *Museums by Artists* in '83 and that was specifically Jorge's idea. He came up with the concept and put it on the table at a board meeting we had at Art Metropole. The staff picked it up and it got developed. Peggy Gale produced the exhibition and Peggy and I produced the book together, but Felix and Jorge were very intimately involved with shaping the content. It's sort of weird actually, because they never wanted any acknowledgement for that. They specifically did not want acknowledgement for that. In their minds it would just lead them into bureaucratic nightmares, meetings and what have you that they didn't want. The exhibitions and projects always literally came out of our conversations. [Phone rings, answers, break in conversation].

Paul O'Neill: Could you tell me something about the thinking behind setting up Art Metropole in 1974 and why you felt it was necessary to do so? Did General Idea always think of it as an artwork?

AA Bronson: I guess our idea about art was that art was something that could piggyback on all sorts of different distribution systems, media distribution systems, and travel into the world. We weren't particularly interested in what seemed like a kind of confined model of art being shown in galleries and having its value enhanced by reviews and museum shows and all that sort of stuff and then being sold to a very limited, mostly wealthy, audience. We were much more

interested in an art that could be much more fluid in the way it travelled through the world. So when we did *FILE Megazine*, for example, and then designed it to be reminiscent of *LIFE* magazine, part of the idea was that if there could be a certain familiarity to the format, it could travel through the existing distribution systems for magazines, news-stands in particular. That was the reason that we wanted to make it look familiar. You know, they might find something totally bizarre inside, but we wanted it to be available to anybody to pick up. So Art Metropole was a sort of extension to that idea. We got really interested in the idea of multiples, and ephemera and artists' books, and video for that matter: reproducible media and artists' use of reproducible media, and trying to provide a sort of sophisticated knowledge of how that material could be sent out into the world and how it could travel.

Paul O'Neill: Was there a necessity to situate what General Idea was doing in a wider context by using Art Metropole as a platform for distribution?

AA Bronson: To tell you the truth, we didn't really think of it like that. We really thought of it as a General Idea piece, that was the funny thing. Art Metropole and the archive were like our shop and our archive in our museum; our museum being the larger world. When we started to have exhibitions in galleries we always conceptualised them within our own project, to co-opt the physical gallery that we were exhibiting in as one of the rooms in our (semi-fictional) museum. Our museum, which we called 'The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavilion', could have rooms in different cities, and it had its own gallery shop and it had its own archive and so on and so forth. We always wanted our world to be much larger than everybody else's, it was more like that. We didn't really think of it as a platform. Funny, we could have obviously, but it wasn't how we thought of it.

Paul O'Neill: The project 'From Sea to Shining Sea' at the Power Plant in Toronto in '87, was that an historical project that tried to situate General Idea in a paradigmatic history of artist-led initiatives in Canada?

AA Bronson: I guess it did that, but I can't say that that was our

primary objective. We realised in the mid eighties that artists younger than ourselves were just not aware of the history of that sort of activity. By the mid eighties, the activity in the sixties, for example, was largely forgotten. There was some amazing activity in the sixties in Canada, especially in Vancouver, that, although we were not part of, we didn't want to be lost. I was invited by the Power Plant to propose an exhibition and what I really wanted to do and what the three of us had wanted to do for some time was to publish this book, this sort of history, and so the exhibition became the excuse to do the history. The book included everything from very historical information from the post-war period up to contemporary work by people exhibiting new work that they had made especially for the exhibition. It was a total range from the current to the historical, and put into an historical context. We were very, very conscious of the debt that we owed in particular to a group called Intermedia from Vancouver, which started in '67 and lasted about three years, and also to people like Marshall McLuhan. One can trace a whole sort of media perspective within Canadian culture, largely from being immediately next to the U.S, but not part of it, and having this sort of observer's view on what is a totally media culture. We, as Canadians, always had our critical view of media culture and that resulted in people like Marshall McLuhan and that sort of viewpoint spawned a whole way of producing art, the sort of art that came out of Vancouver, for example, in the early sixties, and after.

Paul O'Neill: You mentioned the catalogue that accompanied the exhibition and that it was the germination of the idea?

AA Bronson: Yes, that was the primary product more than the exhibition was, not a catalogue so much as a book.

Paul O'Neill: Was the historical narrative told in a linear way?

AA Bronson: The book consisted of a series of regional histories in essay form, followed by a chronology of events for the entire country. I divided the country into five loose geographical regions and invited one person from each of those areas to assemble the research for their area, and each of those people wrote an essay about that part of Canada and their regional history. Then we wrote little blurbs about

each event that we came across and the dates and the people involved and what had happened and illustrated them with photos. Those were assembled in chronological order, starting with 1948. I think the earliest is from '48. And that to me is the more interesting part, just to see that flow of history, just to see the months and the years roll by and what happened, just flipping through the book and seeing how that activity enlarged and transformed.

Paul O'Neill: You were clearly very keen to locate what you were doing in relation to Canada, but were you looking to other models of group activity outside of Canada?

AA Bronson: From a very early time, when we first started, we almost immediately began to correspond with Gilbert and George; a group called Ecart in Geneva, which was more or less led primarily by John Armleder; Maurizio Nanucci in Florence and his Zona Group and their Zona archives and Ulysses Carrion in Amsterdam who had a little bookstore called 'Other Books and So'. Also a group in Vancouver called Image Bank, and Ray Johnson here in New York who somehow felt like a group, even though he was only one person. [Laughs] And all of these people were very interested in exchange. And we had quite a bit of correspondence with Warhol too with his Factory and all that. It was probably less primary, but more or less because we were so entranced by him and he was very generous in communicating back with us. At any rate we were certainly linked to all these groups and there was a certain language that we all shared, a certain way of thinking about ourselves, and what we were doing.

Paul O'Neill: How would you describe this common language?

AA Bronson: We were all very interested in distributable media and we were all interested in an art that could travel in a much more freeform way, without so much of a relationship to money, but more in a relationship to interest and dialogue, an art economy, we could call it.

Paul O'Neill: How important were Fluxus to GI?

AA Bronson: We were in communication with some of the Fluxus people as

individuals: Joseph Beuys and George Maciunas and Ken Freedman from California, and of course Robert Filliou and Ben Vautier. Beuys was one of the first subscribers to *File Megazine*, along with Warhol, the two of them, which is sort of nice and we were big fans of Joseph Beuys already by the late sixties and we were really interested in his whole concept of the unlimited multiple, you know the *Intuition* box. There was a little British magazine that started in '69 and lasted until '71 or so and they published *The Intuition Box* by Joseph Beuys as an unlimited edition. It is very interesting because I can't think of any unlimited multiple before *The Intuition Box;* I think it is the first one. We kept trying to order it from this magazine, they kept running out of them, and we never got one. [Laughs]

Paul O'Neill: You also mentioned the Situationist Internationale earlier, how familiar were you with their early writings?

AA Bronson: In the sixties there was a cartoon strip that the International Situationists produced and franchised to underground papers and I was familiar with them through the underground paper that I was one of the editors of, pre-General Idea, and so most of my knowledge of them was through the cartoon strip and not through the other writings. *The Society of the Spectacle* became available in English around 1970 and somehow that appeared in our hands from a little press in Chicago and that fit into our whole universe perfectly. It became a primary document for us as soon as we had it.

Paul O'Neill: In the US at least, Seth Siegelaub is often represented as the beginning of independent curating in the late sixties, but artists were already curating from within their own practice, and using interventionalist and mediating strategies as part of their remit - to separate out the role of the artist and the curator historically can be problematic, is that something you would agree with?

AA Bronson: Interestingly, one of Seth Siegelaub's first projects was at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver in 1969, where Ian Baxter of the N.E. Thing Company, and one of the founders of Intermedia were teaching. Collaboration had already been hot and trendy for several years at this point in Vancouver, beginning with the Festival of the

Arts in the early sixties and leading to the founding of Intermedia in 1967. And the artists of Intermedia had already begun to curate exhibitions and events, notably the three annual exhibitions they produced at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 1967, 1968 and 1969. Another example is the Tripps festival in Vancouver, in which *all* the films of Andy Warhol made to date (only *Chelsea Girls* had sound) were presented simultaneously in an indoor hockey stadium. All of these projects grew out of the model of the Festival of the Arts, which was essentially a festival of performance, and I would argue that the very idea of independent curating emerges from this crossover between the visual and performing arts at this time in this place.

On another note, we could look at early publishing collaborations, which were essentially curatorial projects. John Armleder and the Ecart group in Geneva were publishing collaborative projects by 1969; Maurizio Nanucci in Florence also generated print-based projects with many artist contributors in which there was some sort of vision. He really came out of a scene of concrete poetry and moved into visual arts, but so did Lawrence Weiner for that matter and so did Carl Andre. Both Armleder and Nanucci ran little empires, in a way empire is not the right word at all. John's practice was based around having tea, actually, so that it was like one ongoing open house with tea served continuously in this little space that he opened that was sort of a bookstore only half the time, he never knew what price anything was. It was very, very flaky, they had one of those little hand-operated mimeograph presses, and they would produce these collaborative printed projects.

Paul O'Neill: Would you have described what Ecart or even what you were doing as 'artist-curating' at the time or how would it have been discussed?

AA Bronson: We would have seen them as artist's projects and still today John Armleder has a little stand at the Basel art fair every June, which is called Ecart, and it's his little gallery and he shows whoever he wants in it and sometimes it's a group show and sometimes it's a solo show; it's like the memory of what he was doing then. John's teaching practice is also quite interesting, in that he is constantly getting his students to do projects in which they

collaborate in making some sort of artist's activity visible, in other words, a curatorial project. For example, one year he brought his entire class to New York in June and they set up some sort of cheap printing press in the American Fine Arts gallery and invited artists to come by and print anything they wanted and the students worked with the artists and they produced all this material that went back out into the world again.

Paul O'Neill: There seems to be a greater connectivity for you and for General Idea with Northern Europe, rather than somewhere like London or New York even?

AA Bronson: We never really had any real connection with London except for individuals: Gilbert and George, Genesis P-Orridge and for some reason Allen Jones and Richard Hamilton. Those were our contacts.

Paul O'Neill: Did you show in London at the time?

AA Bronson: We showed at Canada House in 1977 [Laughs]. It was sort of funny because the people I have just mentioned were the people who came to the opening. We had met Allen Jones because he had had a show in Toronto and Richard Hamilton we met because he had had a show in Toronto. Gilbert and George and Genesis P-Orridge we hadn't met in person before and we all went dancing together, Gilbert and George took us dancing. It was a very peculiar group of people dancing together [Laughs]. It got very wild as you can imagine, you know Gilbert and George got drunker and drunker until they were flinging people around the room, knocking over tables. It was very funny. It was a very peculiar evening.

Paul O'Neill: How did GI's practice develop into the mid eighties, and when you moved to New York you began the AIDS project, based on Robert Indiana's LOVE logo, what were the origins of this ongoing project?

AA Bronson: In the eighties we developed the whole idea of the multiple much further and this became, beginning in 1979, a major project for us, our own low cost multiples, forgetting about Art Metropole for the moment. We developed the idea of 'the Boutique-as-artwork', which we had first played with in our storefront in 1969.

The Boutiques were sort of our gallery shops, which we could put into our museum. The Boutiques were always a big problem because, when we had a museum show, the museums never wanted to sell anything out of them, in those days you weren't supposed to sell anything in the galleries. The gallery was the pristine, pure white cube where no money changed hands. The other thing was that the museum shops hated to have the competition of our little boutique.

In 1985 we had our first show in the US, at the Albright-Knox in Buffalo, which was amazing because at that point we had been showing all over Europe for the previous nine years. It was a good way to start. Immediately after that show, we were approached by a gallery called International With Monument in the East Village, the trendy gallery of the moment, and Jeff Koons and people like that were showing there at the time. We decided to move to New York. Our practice in terms of exhibiting and selling was totally based in Europe at that time. We had sort of used up Canada, we had done everything we could in Canada. It's a small country really in terms of audience or museums, especially back then. We realised that all Europeans went through New York and that if we were in New York we could see all the European curators and the gallerists who passed through all the time. So we made this decision to move to New York in '86. I remember Lawrence Weiner telling me at the time, 'you realise this isn't going to change your practice, it's still going to be based entirely in Europe, and you are not going to get any action here', and that was fairly true. Although we did do some exhibitions and projects and so on, and there is a history now of GI in the USA.

In '87, a friend of ours who worked at the Canadian Consulate here in New York died of AIDS. We were involved in his care up to the last moments and perhaps as a result of this we turned very quickly towards work related to AIDS. For the next seven years, from 1987 through 1994 – when Felix and Jorge died – all of our attention went to the issue of AIDS. We pulled in all the knowledge we had about how to produce products that could run through various systems, advertising systems or whatever, and how to work with billboards, placards on buses, how to do projects that might take place in a subway car, or how to do something that could appear on television. We focused all that experience with media on that one issue. For three or four years, we

focused almost exclusively on projects using our AIDS logo and then after that our AIDS work began to take on more various forms.

Paul O'Neill: In an interview with Mike Kelley in 2003 I remember you saying that it was Sherrie Levine who said 'well, now you can't do anything else for the next two years' after you made your first AIDS painting in 1986?

AA Bronson: Yes, she did. We had always worked in a multifaceted and complex narrative sort of way, and so this idea took us by surprise at first. But we realised that she was right. And that is what we did for the next several years, in fact more than two years in the end. (I am still sending out permissions for various organisations to use the AIDS logo today!)

Paul O'Neill: From the outside looking in, that whole period in relation to the issue of AIDS in New York, seems to be very insulated and there was a kind of community of people dedicated to the issue in New York, people like Gran Fury, Act Up etc, were you part of that?

AA Bronson: You know, oddly enough, we weren't part of it. They hated us and they had a big chip on their shoulders about us. Frankly, I never really understood what it was about. I think part of it was that we were infringing on their territory. We weren't Americans, our work didn't appear to be angry, and that seemed to be a big drawback. Also, we weren't didactic, that wasn't our approach, to be didactic. We wanted visibility for a disease that was being hushed. We took the logo, dealt with it like an advertising campaign, and sent it out like a virus into the world. We just made it multiply as much as we could in the world. And we would always get criticisms like: how can you spend all that money on posters and not put any information about safe sex on them, that sort of thing.

Paul O'Neill: So you weren't marching in the streets?

AA Bronson: No we weren't part of that and we wouldn't have been welcome as part of that.

Paul O'Neill: Would you have had much exchange with people like Felix

Gonzalez Torres and Group Material?

AA Bronson: I was a friend of Felix. He was fine. Actually, Group Material when they did projects in relation to AIDS, they would always include us. I have to say Group Material was the exception there. You know Felix was very sympathetic; we had a good relation there. Part of that probably came from meeting him in sex clubs.

Paul O'Neill: *Felix, June 5, 1994* (1995/2000) was your first stand-alone work as a solo artist after Felix and Jorge died. Did you always think of this photograph you took of Felix as becoming a work?

AA Bronson: Yes, I did. I can still remember taking the photograph, vividly. The hair on the nape of my neck was standing on end, and I knew that I would have to do something with this image, which was then emblazoned on my retina. I needed to send it out into the world. In the end, it took form as a billboard in the city of Munich, where Felix's emaciated visage also called forth memories of the concentration camps.

Paul O'Neill: You mentioned the book, *Museums by Artists*, can you tell me more about that project?

AA Bronson: Actually it is a book that is totally related to what you are doing. It's a book that presents artist's projects related to the concept of a museum. On the smallest level it might be Robert Filliou's concept of his hat as a museum or the *Museum of Eagles* by Marcel Broodthaers. It was sort of along that line. There were Buren's writings from the late seventies, about and in relation to the museum. So it took that complete spectrum, from the artist's theoretical approach to looking at the museum, through to the very playful small-scale thing like a museum in a hat. I have an essay in it, which is specifically about Canadian artist-run centres and that history. I wanted to locate that history within a much broader discourse of artists' interest in the concept of the museum. That book was the foundation of 'The Museum as Muse' exhibition, curated by Kynaston McShine at MoMA, which I was so pissed off they didn't acknowledge. *Museums by Artists* was a direct source and if you look at one book and the other, you can see all the crossover stuff. It was

published in '83 and it seemed that no one would buy it when it was first published. I started keeping a graph of sales, because the number of copies that were sold each year began to double. We sold like five the first year and it took about ten years to sell about 1000 copies [Laughs].

Paul O'Neill: Have you ever thought of republishing?

AA Bronson: We have talked about it at Art Metropole, but the problem is that it takes so much money to republish something and it takes away money from a new project, especially in the Canadian context, where there is so little money for publishing.

Paul O'Neill: Last year you became Director of Printed Matter in New York, and more recently you were involved in setting up the new space on 10th Avenue, what are your ambitions for the space and how will your experience with Art Metropole impact upon it as an organisation?

AA Bronson: Printed Matter is now thirty years old. Artists' books began as a particular strategy, as a means of making art that could be distributed throughout the world in a low-cost format. It was a democratic form. I find that younger artists are developing a much broader spectrum of approaches to this same idea, and I would like to help Printed Matter become more responsive to what artists are doing, rather than being stuck with a model that is no longer current. I see Printed Matter as a place where people can gather, exchange information, try things out, not just as the kind of art bookshop that it had become.

Paul O'Neill: How do you think curatorial practice has developed since the late eighties, particularly in relation to the 'artist-curator' model? During this time there has been a greater visibility for curators?

AA Bronson: There are two things that I have noticed from this period. One is the emergence of the curator as the star and in many cases to the detriment of the artist, where the artist becomes the illustration for the curator, which I always find intensely annoying. I remember Les Levine published an article in the *Village Voice* in the eighties

critical of group exhibitions, and at a certain point he established a policy of not being in group shows anymore. The other thing, that I actually like very much, are the projects by Hans Ulrich Obrist, which to me demonstrate a more open and fluid approach. He asked us to be involved in a project around the time that Felix and Jorge were basically on their deathbeds, and I only sent half the information, he wanted a text and an illustration for this book of unrealised projects, *Unbuilt Roads*. Our project had only ever been a concept and there wasn't any illustration to give, and he kept saying, well just draw something, just draw something. He didn't want to have a blank page. Anyway, I do think his projects are brilliantly conceived.

Paul O'Neill: Why do you think that that is a more productive curatorial model?

AA Bronson: Well, I guess it is returning to the model that I am more familiar with, this model of a container within which an artist can create something and the container is of a type that creates dispersion into the world, whether it is his billboards or posters or whatever. They are very much based on stuff that people like us did long ago and institutionalising that process. I don't feel that institutionalising them has lessened these projects.

Paul O'Neill: There is a similarity to the kind of language used by Hans Ulrich and artists associated with the avant-garde exhibition design in the twenties and thirties, such as Dada, or Kiesler, Dorner or Duchamp with the Surrealists and their use of terms such as transformativity, fluidity and flux.

AA Bronson: I think it comes out of that tradition and also what we do comes in a way from the Surrealist tradition, where they treated the gallery as an environment rather than a white cube. The gallery becomes part of the experience of the art. Also if you look at the Dadaists and Surrealists and especially the Russian Constructivists and their use of books, and I guess the Futurists were using the political pamphlet, those are another related idea.

Paul O'Neill: Do you see an historical lineage between these movements and General Idea?

AA Bronson: Yes, I have always thought of us as part of that lineage.

Paul O'Neill: General Idea have become more visible in the last few years, why do you think there has been such a resurgent and insurgent interest in the work of GI? Is this the moment when the legacy of GI is being historicised or mythologised?

AA Bronson: Historicised, I hope. Mythologised too, I think! Since I am still living, it has taken ten years for people to realise that General Idea is gone, that only the Estate of General Idea remains. What I notice is a tremendous interest in the early work of General Idea, from the 70s, whereas previously we seemed to have been branded 'AIDS artists', especially in America. You know, General Idea always had a significant audience of students and young artists, and interestingly that has not changed. I think the particular strategies we used in our early days holds a great interest for young artists today.

Paul O'Neill: You have just returned from Munich and Dublin, where two quite different retrospective exhibitions of GI are being held at the Kunstverein and Project Gallery respectively, how do you feel about such a looking back activity as having been there first time around and now working as a solo artist?

AA Bronson: I have always found these retrospective exhibitions exceedingly painful, especially if they included video. I found it especially difficult to see and hear Felix, Jorge, and myself, in the video *Test Tube* (1979) for example, or *Shut the Fuck Up* (1985). But this time around everything seemed to change. I found the installation process in Munich completely engaging, and my own viewpoint, I think, had turned from that of the artist to that of an intimately involved observer, discovering again so many delightful moments that I had forgotten. The work still seemed so fresh after so many years. And in Dublin I was struck by how the work can be given new life when it is seen through the eyes of intelligent and empathic curators. This was the first exhibition in which I did not have a large hand in the choice of works and display, and it was a very gratifying experience indeed.

END OF TAPE

DAN CAMERON

New York, 29-03-05

PAUL O'NEILL: So how did you become a curator and what was the first show that you curated?

DAN CAMERON: I probably identified myself first as a curator probably around 1979, 1980. I certainly was organising exhibitions by that point, so it had been just about a year, within a year after coming out of college, finishing my studies and coming almost directly to New York. I mean it was clear to me that that was the direction that I was headed, but I don't know when I began to really say 'being a curator is what I do'. I think I was really trying to find a way that I could write and put together exhibitions, and seeing the notion of organising principles that took place within a curator's framework. Investigating and organising information was extremely appealing to me, but I wasn't really sure how to get started. So I would say the first few years, the first couple of years that I was working, it was really very catch as a catch can, I was just grabbing any opportunity to mount an exhibition of some kind that would include, you know, everything from my full fledged retrospective of a very obscure Russian American geometric abstractionist, whose heyday was sort of the thirties, to you know, a packed in survey of shows, a kind of packed in group exhibition of a multi-generational group of artists, you know, for a gallery on 57th Street, and it certainly didn't really, I wasn't really thinking in terms of museum practice, I wasn't really thinking in terms of being within or without the gallery, I don't really think I had a specific destination in mind. I think the consciousness of that way of looking at what I was doing happened a bit later. So I guess, I mean, the first exhibition that I organised that I would say I took seriously, or that could be taken seriously, was in '82, in the fall of '82, and it was for the New Museum, ironically, and it was called 'Extended Sensibilities' and it was about gay and lesbian content in contemporary art, and I think the exhibition was appealing to them for, you know, a number of different reasons. It was certainly appealing to me because that was an issue that was very close to

my own experience, this was still a couple of years before AIDS hit full force, and it didn't seem to be an area that people were investigating, even though a lot of what I was reading in the seventies - mind you my formation is in philosophy, it's not in art history. At a certain point I just, that's what I studied, so I have been interested in questions about how issues like sexual identity could be translated into contemporary art experience, and I just think there was a very nice meeting of those two ideas in that exhibition. And, you know, it came with a catalogue and it was a lot of research and at the time that I was doing that, I then got involved in organising a historic survey of the work related to Judson Dance Theatre of the late sixties, and so those two projects, both of which were really very much self-directed and self-organised, and you know, in the case of the Judson exhibition I laid out the catalogue myself, and did all that stuff, I would say that's when I crossed a threshold and understood that this was not what I wanted to do, it was what I was going to do, and I was sure by that time that, you know, being a curator was something I was becoming more insistent on, in terms of my own self-designation. Clearly at the same time I was looking around at the museums in New York and not really seeing much of an opportunity there, sort of, it didn't seem like anybody was going to be knocking on my door and inviting me to make exhibitions there. And I think that's one of the reasons why I decamped a bit to Europe, and why most of my curatorial practice, from say '86 to '95, from the mid eighties to the mid nineties, was essentially grounded in Europe.

PON: And would you have seen yourself primarily as an independent curator or were you seeking to at some stage, move into working within the institutional structure?

DC: Well, I had had a series of, you know, day jobs that were art related, but they were clearly sort of nine to five jobs that did not carry the title of curator with them, and each one was a pretty negative experience in personal terms, and I began to

understand that at least until I had myself, how can I say it, until I had myself moving through the kind of field that I wanted to be working with, that I wasn't going to be able to accept working under someone, you know, it's sort of one or the other. I could accept working for myself and being poor and having to slowly build up a practice that way, and I could see having a job I liked during the daytime and promoting, or working on my own projects, you know, evenings and weekends. But it didn't seem like that was going to, was on the cards for me. By the end of '83 I had firmly decided to be independent, and I spent the next 12 years not seeking any kind of permanent job at all. All I was doing was trying to find work, and I would say it was about fifty-fifty writing and exhibition organising.

PON: Do you still see a very clear co-relationship between your role as a critic and your role as a curator?

DC: Yes, I see them as inseparable. I mean, I think that there are some occasions when one doesn't really need to, or where the occasion doesn't really require a deep textual analysis of what one is doing, just as certain kinds of writing projects that I get involved in do not have or don't need a curatorial component as well. I don't think I have any problems with it that way, but I feel that the most significant projects are the ones that have an elaborated textual basis, as well as a driving curatorial thesis, you know, where you can point to the art, you can point to the idea, or you can point to both, but there's no sense that one takes a back seat to the other.

PON: So you're seen as two parallel discourses, kind of overlapping?

DC: Yea, I, for example, I mean I know some curators that don't write and I find that unfathomable. I can't even begin to grasp what would be the pleasure in making an exhibition if you are not also going to produce a text for it.

PON: The curator Rudi Fuchs said that that is one of the things that he seems to believe has changed in the last twenty years, curators no longer wish to write predominantly, are no longer engaged in a self-reflexive criticality in relation to what they're actually doing.

DC: I don't know if I agree with that. I can think of curators my age and younger, somebody like Okwui Enwezor would be a good example, whose practice I think really is based on taking more theoretical or more critical principles, and be able to extrapolate from them a visual experience. I mean, one could argue that maybe he has less invested in making exhibitions than he has in extending his ideas in a certain direction, but I do think that our system permits that kind of variability of roles. I would sometimes rather have a critic who knows exactly what they're doing, select an exhibition, that doesn't really add up, than I would like to see a curator just tossing things up there and coming up with a text that's sort of a bit of subterfuge or a distraction, from lack of content, and I do find that that's, you kind of learn more, in some way that the text obfuscates rather than elucidates, and I find that much more alarming than the notion that curators don't write. But I still feel that, I mean for me I cannot separate, you know, the two notions, basically because I'm not really a, I'm not someone who sees himself in a passive relationship to history, you know, so believe that you're always having to confront and probably challenge some preconceived notions when you set out to make an exhibition. I find that, you know, working against assumed knowledge or assumed realities is one of my biggest motivating forces as a curator. I seem to constantly be working against something, trying to refute something, trying to alter a way of looking at something.

PON: As someone who's curated for over twenty years, how would you see primarily developments within contemporary curating during that period? Are there any dominant forms of curatorial practice which you identify as having most prevalence during that period?

DC: Well, I think that the phenomenon that's the most far reaching, maybe, in some ways, has been, I think has probably come from Hans Ulrich Obrist and practitioners like that, who have really tried to break down the model of the curator as, you know, as a producer within a larger system and tried to transform that idea into someone who actually is more activist or who tries to actively subvert certain power relationships that he encounters in the art system, in the social system, and I think that the question becomes really more one of, you know, I would not go to a Hans Ulrich Obrist exhibition hoping to have an overwhelming, a transformative experience of art, and I guess if you want to balance out the scale a little bit, I still look for that as a curator, I still look for experiences that will completely, sort of bowl me over, and you know, obviously you're looking for it in artists and in what artists do, but I also look for it in what curators do. Every few years you run across an exhibition that's just absolutely spellbinding that one of your colleagues has pulled off, and you just think, that's what it's about, that's what - this idea is now whether the kind of movement towards a more post-curatorial framework of making exhibitions that, where the choosing of the art and the let's say, almost fetishisation of the artist's selection process, I think, that can really stand to be renovated and worked over and turned upside down. In the end what I also want to see is a way of making exhibitions that is equally powerful, but I think it's going to happen, I think it's a matter of time. You know, I'm one of the people who saw Enwezor's '97 'Johannesburg Biennial', and that to me was an example of a truly great exhibition, because of the fact that he really let other people kind of bring their expertise to the table, and created a very polyphonic curatorial experience, and I think that's very rare to come across.

PON: It's similar to what Francesco Bonami tried but whether he succeeded or not with the 'Venice Biennale' in 2003.

DC: Yes, it is the same model. I think it had a very different

set of conditions that he was trying to work within.

PON: Are there particular curatorial models, exhibitions or historical precedents or precursors that have been a key influence on your practice or your thinking about curating?

DC: Well one of the things that I've tried to do is to look for precedents in this country, because I feel that I have over-identified with the European model of producing exhibitions and developing exhibitions, and yet I know that there are aspects of what I do that are intimately rooted in what happened, what goes on in this country in museums, and even though my formation as a curator didn't really involve studying this work, I still have been able to resuscitate for my own uses, certain curatorial practices from the past that I think are of interest for me. Alfred Barr I guess would be a good example, to my mind, of someone who willfully disregarded categories like professional and amateur when it came to artists. He sort of forbade designating artists abstract or not abstract and I think this sort of, you know, this desire to demand a certain taxonomic rigour in terms of what is permitted and what's not, I think is probably more of an American tendency than it is a European one. I think Walter Hopps is maybe an American curator who also works very much with this idea of extreme precision, you know, in terms of his practice, and so I feel like I actually benefited from recognising that, although I may have, in my own work, a desire to enliven the intellectual discourse surrounding what I'm doing, I also want to remember that if I'm extremely fussy about how things look, there's a reason for that as well, that I'm also coming from a certain tradition in my own practice. But I feel that what I've had to do is a certain leapfrogging over conventions before I've even understood that there were conventions, you know, like working abroad, as an American curator, from the late eighties to the early nineties was a very eye opening experience because I found that I was constantly running up against my own preconceptions but also those of my colleagues working in Europe,

and at times I thought that the interest in an American curator who was comfortable working within European art was sort of, a little bit freakish, you know, that there was something about the exotic aspect of American art to many Europeans, that meant that the notion of rapport, building a bridge between cultural perspectives that actually now seem even wider apart, was actually something that I was going to take, that it was going to become part of my project, you know, because I didn't really find, I didn't really feel comfortable believing that as an American curator my job is to make my argument from the standpoint of American art practice. In fact I was violently opposed to that, and yet I also felt that sort of minimising or stereotyping, pigeonholing what the contribution of American art had been during that whole period was also a big problem on the part of European curators. I mean I was seeing way too much, you know, Jason Rhodes abroad to really sort of say, are you guys really being serious about this, or are you just trying to treat LA as the anti-New York, and this is sort of the natural outcome from that, or do you only want to see American art that looks like European art. You know, the deeper you get into these sorts of questions, the more I think you are coming from an informed perspective to the imbalanced cultural dialogue taking place between Europe and America right now.

PON: It was quite a transformative period in the late eighties, early nineties, particularly in relation to the production of curatorial paradigms or new curatorial models, I'm thinking of Jean Hubert Martin's, 'Les Magicien De La Terre', or Lyotard's 'Les Immateriaux', which are still to this day very important shows. Would they have been, quite important to you or...?

DC: The Lyotard was more important to me from the point of view of the kind of essay behind it. I thought that what he had really done was built something sort of on the critical contributions of others, and, you know, it was sort of so in keeping with his philosophy, I sort of felt that this is the perfect show but it's

probably the only show he could ever do, sort of like once in a lifetime experience, and once you've done it, where do you go from there. The Martin model was much different, I mean, that was a model that completely, I mean, everything really shifted, I mean it was the turning point in many ways, in a sense probably as much of a degree as Johannesburg, I mean, I think that they were two markers, 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', in '89 to 'Johannesburg 2' in '97, you've got this constant struggle going on in the art world over how to define the global and who owns the global. I think that what was disturbing to me as an American, going to 'Les Magiciens de la Terre', is to understand that, even in the most rarified French curatorial discourses, that the baggage of colonial practice just couldn't be superceded, it couldn't be gainsaid, they were somehow still falling prey to, well I mean my simplification of it, became defining all art from industrialised nations as conceptually or minimally grounded and defining all art from non-industrial nations as being made from mud and sticks and stones, and I think that that was, that was what sank 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' as an exhibition, but as a premise, the only thing that I think has been added to it is the idea that you don't use the situations that created these imbalances to simply replicate them or shine a light on them, but you actually have to use the curatorial undertaking to rewrite those situations, and I mean rewrite as W R I T E, rewrite as an in RIGHT, that you have to actually go in there and in your choices of collaborators, and media or methodologies, you have to be aware that you are also addressing those imbalances, and they must be incorporated somehow, and how you address it must be part of a decision making process, and interestingly that's kind of an intellectual tradition I found myself stepping into when I began to work here, you know that somehow, the New Museum's kind of insistence on alternative spaces and popular art and outsider art and regional art, was a precursor to a lot of the nineties discourse, about art being made in far flung places and how curators at the centre are finding themselves working with it.

PON: In the *Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski discusses the historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think that this amnesia has somehow affected the way in which we perceive contemporary art curating?

DC: Well I think it's a very important factor in the way that contemporary curators are trained right now. What I find in my biggest exposure, I have an ongoing exposure to the participation in some way with the programme at De Appel and at the Royal College of Art, and all of them I find that the sort of questions surrounding display and representations of power are neatly skirted in favour of a mindset that seems to be more about 'don't upset the apple cart until you can get yourself a secure position in the art world', and I mean, it's something I'm beginning to become sort of adamant about when I talk to curatorial students, because I think that, you know, we don't want to see this kind of Darwinian economic model that the gallery system in New York currently functions by, as transposing itself on how curators are educated, because I think that you know, if you can't feel free to explore experimental models from the past, or to produce your own experimental models or incorporate ways of bringing older art with new art, or non-art with art or you know, certain kinds of ways of expanding on curatorial practices, then I think that you're not going to, you're not going to be able to give voice to all of the possibilities that I think are there, and I don't think you're going to be responsive to everything that's happening in contemporary art either, if you're limiting yourself to those practices, but more and more I'm finding that the emphasis on the well constructed exhibition, which generally uses kind of conventional and conservative display models, I think is the one that's been generated to almost the exclusion of any other alternative.

PON: If I am understanding you correctly, I would agree with that every exhibition should say as much about the curating, or the history of curating, as it does or should about the works that are

on display, is that what you are saying or is this an element of what you're suggesting?

DC: Yes, I would also say that I think the curatorial process should incorporate the possibility of undercutting itself, or devaluing the authorial, the authoritarian role, authoritative role of the author. No, I think you should be able to make those decisions and the implications of those decisions felt to the viewer somehow. If not through, you know, installation devices, then through the actual active participation of the artist in revamping the structure of the exhibition. I know one of the things that I have learnt here is that you often don't want to approach the collaboration with an artist, especially if it's a large scale or long term collaboration, with too much of a predetermined structure in your mind, because part of that process involves being able to revamp, being able to improvise, being able to start all over from scratch right in the middle of the project, and I don't know to what degree students, tutorial training programmes don't really get students ready for that kind of experience.

PON: Do you think that post-graduate courses have an impact upon say, younger curators, or contemporary art practice since the late eighties?

DC: Yea, because I don't think that they've had a chance. You're starting to see now the first waves of graduates of you know, De Appel or Bard beginning to step into sort of more intermediary curatorial roles within institutions or biennial structures and I think that's going to, I think that you're going to see something that's different, you're going to experience something that's different but I don't exactly know what that is. I do know that the impulse to describe things as having been curated and to identify the curator and designate a curator in every project is definitely a commonplace now of our time, but the notion of what a curator does is shifting quite dramatically.

PON: There are also graduates from the Whitney Independent Study Programme who are working as curators such as Carlos Basualdo or Raul Zamudia who is running 'White Box' now. So I think there's also that, I think it's the first generation if you like of curating students.

DC: Sure, like Anne Algood, she came from Bard, she was here for a while as an Associate Curator, then she went to work with Peter Norton and she's just showing the Hirschhorn, I feel like, OK, that's a good example of a curator, you know, in her mid-thirties, you know, who's now been circulating in the art world for about a decade, you know, it's the same for a lot of these students, and I think you'll start to see their work, their craft, you know, in a more public way. I just don't think that the way curators' careers happen, many of them haven't had the opportunity to do anything on a larger scale, because I think the other side of this is that the field has really been flooded with people who are chomping at the bit to work, and you know, in the States there simply aren't enough opportunities, you know, for that kind of job, so when entry level jobs become available in an institution like ours, it's just pandemonium, you know people wanting those jobs, because it's sort of like this is the only job in New York, you know, that a typical graduate from Bard, let's say, would want, but it only comes up every six years or something and there's only one person for the job! You know, and in this case we hired both of our most recent curators from abroad. You know, we didn't want Americans, well partly because we couldn't find American curators who were being trained in anything other than American art, which I find is just really short sighted on the part of their institutions.

PON: I was reading through your list of your ten top shows or exhibitions, which have made evident a certain breakthrough or created new models of curating, from 'Places with a Past' by Mary Jane Jacobs, right through to 'Global Conceptualism' by Luis Camnitzer, Jane Farver and Rachel Weiss. If you were to include

one of your own exhibitions within the paradigms of a history of curating, which one would you select as being the one that is perhaps most groundbreaking?

DC: Well, I would have to say, from that standpoint, 'Cocido y Crudo' in '94 was the most significant, because what I tried to do was take the 'Magiciens de la Terre' model and this was what, exactly five years later. And to say you know, rather than going out into the field and bringing things back, what 'Cocido y Crudo' focused on was going out into the field and finding ways of integrating the artist with the institution. So, all of the projects were more or less conceptual collaborations between the artist and institution, and sort of orchestrated by the curator, and it took a long time and a lot of money and an incredible amount of co-ordination to make it happen, but I knew that the point that I wanted to make was that there had to be a representation of a certain aspect of democracy in this exhibition, kind of an equal playing field, if you want, between participants, regardless of where they were from, and I felt that the only way to achieve that was to make sure that artists in China or in Brazil or in Africa really understood how far they could push their proposals, which in most cases was further than they had expected to be told, and that's maybe the thing that I'm the most happy about, in terms of that exhibition, in that I was able to I think, really construct a solid exhibition, mostly out of proposals developed in the course of the exhibition on the part of the artists, when no one was really sort of like keeping a lid on or trying to direct the content of it, so much of it was about sort of saying to the artist, you know, go, go, push it further, push it further, and again I feel like that's been a very valuable experience here. The other project that I'm very happy with was Istanbul in 2003.

PON: Istanbul seemed to be very clearly an attempt to return to the city as the centre of the place of production and the production of context etcetera, maybe in response to Robert

Fleck's show, which had a certain autonomy, a separateness from the city.

DC: Yea, and I think the other issue that was very much on my mind was politics, you know, how do you explore political questions or political content within the framework of an exhibition, where the cultural norm would be secular Islam, and the proximity of this culture to everything that's happening in the Middle East right now is so close that for you to ignore or overlook it or minimise it, it just struck me as absolute folly, and yet I noticed the last couple of editions had really been much more like, you know, look on the bright side, let's, you know, let's kind of hold hands and go through this together. They had a very, I would say a kind of an almost childlike innocence about the notion of cultural difference, and that seemed to me and when I looked at that I thought, that was OK for the late nineties, but I'm not sure it's OK anymore. I sort of think that if the West wants to take a position, it needs to take it quite powerfully, you know, in terms of its recognition of the 'other' as an equally empowered player at the table, and anything less than that is going to be read as just wildly imperialist in its tendencies, especially in this case coming from an American. So I think one of the things that was exciting to me about that show was to say 'can we begin to now push social and political content to the centre of the discussion?' But again, knowing what we know in a kind of a post, how can I say it, a post cultural melting pot framework, but really more like the tent formation, where everybody has their own space and their own reality and their own sort of rules and thresholds, for how do you enter and engage, and I would definitely like to keep exploring in that area, I mean if I could go on and keep working on that scale, that would be the next stage where I'd like to take that.

PON: How sensitive were you to the idea or to Ralph Rugoff's idea of the 'international curator' as being a global jet-setting flâneur into one country to curate a biennial and then jetting out

back and then returning to another country and curating another biennial, and to me it's a term that's often used as a critique of the rise of the curator as international producer of culture?

DC: Well I feel like that because my model for working internationally and creating exhibitions with an international import to them, really comes from working in Spain, and that's still sort of my test case for a lot of my other engagements, and I felt that the very first step I had to take in terms of being comfortable about working in Spain, which at that time also had a lot to do with being an appreciator of current Spanish art, was to become as well informed an expert in the field as anybody locally on the ground, and I think that's one of the things that is most intimidating to someone like Ralph Rugoff, because if you don't start making that commitment to do that research, you're never gonna catch up. In fact, you have to sort of, you have to start early for the recognition that you can't possibly ever catch up, but that should never prevent you from delving into it as deeply as you possibly can. I think that probably more than most of the curators of the past 'Istanbul Biennials' for example, I wanted to make myself into an expert in contemporary Turkish art, and I had a lot of preliminary visits to the city in relationship to other biennials, I had always been an active participant in it, I had worked with Turkish artists here at the New Museum, and I felt that part of the reason they asked me to be involved was that they already saw me as having made a commitment to the cultural situation. I think I would be very wary of a situation where I was sort of invited to sort of drop in and present something, because I don't feel that that's taking full curatorial responsibility for your hosts.

PON: But I think that to me there does seem to be certainly an element of self-reflexivity within your role of the curator of the 'Istanbul Biennial' as an American coming from outside.

DC: That's different, and I think that that was understood, in

part because I went to great lengths to particularise my own political position, vis a vis the war in Iraq, which obviously was the hot button topic that year, and what I understood from that was that the Turks in particular, appreciated having you know, a well informed, articulate American around, who represented the exact opposite of the viewpoint that they were having shoved down their throats constantly, you know, by their own leaders and by our leaders as well, and I think for them, they were much more relaxed and comfortable understanding that, you know, the position that I was taking was one that was of an active opposition to what my Government was taking, and I think that enabled me to personalise my own work in terms of the dialogue with the artists, because I think any bit of tip-toeing around that subject would have been extremely counterproductive.

PON: Do you think there is such a thing as a good exhibition and a bad exhibition?

DC: Oh sure, and I think it's really very much like art, I mean, you only really come across a small fraction that speaks to you, that you have to keep looking and looking and looking at all the stuff that doesn't. Yea, I've seen plenty of truly lousy exhibitions in my time, and they certainly outnumber the ones that I've seen that are memorable. I think most exhibitions are neither one nor the other. I think most exhibitions don't actually incorporate enough self-conscious internal development to qualify as having, as being sort of good or bad in that sense at all. I'm finding that a lot of exhibitions that I'm seeing lately are really sort of just excuses for random gatherings, you know, of objects that are more or less tastefully on display, and I don't think that's curating at all, that's a little bit closer to me, to decorating.

PON: I mean, do you think the group exhibition has become the default button for contemporary art curating?

DC: Well I don't think it's the group exhibition, because I think that, I think that's actually been with us since the earliest, you know, days of you know, the Academy and the Salon de Refusée, and you know Secession and the early 'Venice Biennales'. I mean, I think that art belongs in a position of visual or apparent exchange with other art, I mean, I think that that's a model for how we ourselves talk about art, whether it's around or whether it's something we've seen. I mean, I think that you get a certain kind of knowledge being saturated in an intensive experience of one artist's work, but I think you can actually take away more from an enlightened encounter with many, many artists' work, and ideally many artists who are not sort of simply carbon copies of each other. I think the fault right now lies in accepting the group exhibition as a standard that cannot be questioned, because I think the group show can be questioned, and its authorship and its structure and its motives and all of that can be elucidated and pulled apart and have different lights shown on it, and there's not enough of that kind of activity taking place. So it's not so much a matter of doing group shows or not doing group shows, but it's doing group shows unconsciously.

PON: Do you think a curated exhibition can be a work of art in itself?

DC: Sure, if an artist does it. Yea, I'm not interested in curators calling themselves, you know, producers or creators or things like that, I don't see what we do as art, at least insofar as I'm still sort of amazed at what artists do, and I think that they're not quite as amazed at what I do in the same way. You know, we just have extremely different roles, and on the other hand I've seen artists do things with selection and installation that are so innovative and creative that they do qualify as works of art, and exhibitions at the same time.

PON: Do you think we need any more international biennials?

DC: I think we need to revitalise what the biennial stands for. You know, I think it's, I don't think it's really panned out in a city like Berlin, you know, I think that it's become a bit of an albatross, even though I understand the motive for trying to find other structures of experience, for public experience of art, in a city like Berlin, I just think they've got to look somewhere else. I think future capital cities and large cultural regions are not really the places to have biennials. I actually think the alternative biennials, which you know, Istanbul was in a way one of the forerunners of, but I would say Sao Paulo, I wish Johannesburg was still around, and or Shanghai, Tirana, these are places that I think are always interesting to go to for an exhibition, I'll always go to see 'Manifesta', no matter where they stick it, just because I feel that that's itself an intriguing model of how a biennial can happen. I think that the art fairisation of biennials is something that's a bit worrisome in that they are, you know, dressed up a bit like, you know, expanded showrooms, in a way, and I don't think that's helping matters very much, if the viewers themselves can't take away some kind of intellectual rigour.

PON: You're one of the few curators who is as visible as an art critic. How important is the role of criticism to your practice as a curator?

DC: I don't read as much criticism as I might, but writing about art is absolutely integral to my own process of understanding art, through working with it as a curator. It's a cliché, but I'm one of these writers who, I don't really know what I think about something until I start to write about it, and then I'm usually surprised to discover that what I'm thinking is probably, is generally more complicated or perhaps self-contradictory than what I'd expected it to be, and that's really helped me in terms of putting the dots together when it comes to connecting with other artists' work or being able to respond fruitfully in a situation where I'm faced with something unknown or difficult to decipher,

because I find that the philosophical engagement with a work of art, the critical engagement with a work of art, brings up a way of questioning and looking at and interrogating your own experience that is very, very useful in other aspects of curatorial work, mostly exposing yourself to things that are new, and trying to ascertain whether there is something there for you or not. I think that's one of the most difficult experiences for a curator and it happens all the time.

PON: Do you see the exhibition as a thinking process in the same way as you see your writing in order to engage with something or not?

DC: No, I actually think of the exhibition as creating the ideal setting for certain art experiences to happen. So in that sense you are building something and you are trying to - I mean I'm often struck by how important it is for me to create an exhibition that satisfies me as a viewer, that I'm actually someone making an exhibition in order to walk through it, to have the experience for myself that, if I do come out on the other end and I say to myself 'oh, that was marvellous, what I was hoping for', then I feel quite comfortable asking other people to go through it, because I think that whatever it is I'm trying to convey is in fact getting through, at least it's getting through to me. So I think that there's a certain amount of curatorial work that's scenographic.

PON: Scenographic?

DC: Yea, in the sense that you're creating spatial and visual situations around the artwork, in order to make the engagement with the artwork as, you know, as intense or as resonant as the artist would like it to be, as the viewer would like it to be, and that's completely different to writing, you know, I feel as if writing about art, you're really actually addressing the viewer's doubts or scepticism, about what an artist does, and I find that's something I'm always kind of unconsciously addressing, is the

tendency to dismiss or to scoff.

PON: Have you any, would you believe in the idea that curating is ultimately an autographic practice? Autographic as in a sense a form of self-representation?

DC: No, well yes there's a dimension in which that's unavoidable, but I don't think that, I don't think that walking around inside a curated exhibition, in terms of wanting access to the curator's head, is quite the same as walking around an artist's exhibition, in that you've got access to the artist's head.

PON: That's an interesting distinction.

DC: Because I, I'm not sure how much of one's own world view is important in a project where you're actually showcasing the artist's creation of different possible world views, none of which may actually belong to him or her, and certainly some of which may not belong to you, but you're nevertheless creating the situation in which that happens, and which later the public comes in and partakes of a situation. So I, that's why I'm a little wary of trying to talk about how my own world view would come into an exhibition, because so much of that I feel is already involved in inviting an artist to be a participant in a project, and from that point on, you sort of relinquished control.

PON: I mean autographic in the sense also that there is a clearly definable Dan Cameron or Hans Ulrich Obrist exhibition?

DC: I don't think there is actually a Dan Cameron show as such, because I think my range of interest moves around a lot, you know, I do a lot with much more cutting edge things, and I've dealt with a lot, but a bit with more historical material. I think that there may be a certain appeal to a kind of a museum historiography in my own work, where I'm trying to track things like, you know, distances and proximities, and the openness or closed-ness of

spaces in terms of my own past experiences with other curators' exhibitions. I mean I do think that you absorb certain tacit lessons from your own favourite encounters and one of those is, has to do with, I think you're sort of semi-consciously making notes about how you yourself could later take those little secret recipes or short paths to apply them to something that you're doing.

PON: How visible do you make that historiograpic relationship present in the mediation of the show?

DC: I think I'm only semi-conscious of it myself. It's just when I'm in the act of trying to create a certain effect, I do find myself asking myself why, like what it means and how it pertains, because sometimes, you know sometimes you find yourself going further to protect what you see as the integrity of what the artist is doing, than the artists themselves seem to feel is necessary, you know, and I sometimes think that that's a mode that I get into because I have already, as a viewer, invested a great deal in this idea that, you know, when you're in the grip of a certain kind of installation or artwork or artistic vision, it's you know, it's an incomparably powerful sort of exchange that goes on, and I'm always thinking of ways that that can happen for other people, trying to replicate the conditions by which amazing encounters with works of art take place, and I know and I respect both Hans Ulrich Obrist's or Hou Hanru's practices, but I'm fully aware that that's not what they're doing, you know, in their work, but I don't need to go to their exhibitions to try to get what I put into my own exhibitions. You know, I'm perfectly happy to go to their exhibitions and take whatever I want from them as a spectator and then steal whatever I want in terms of, you know, their various ways of approaching both.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

LYNNE COOKE

New York, 06-05-04

PAUL O'NEILL: What would you identify as the most recent developments within curatorial practice over the last 10-15 years?

LYNNE COOKE: I think there has been a professionalising of curating and with that a theorising of it and there is now a certain level of academic discourse around it and quite often this is not generated by curators themselves and at some remove from what the actual practice is. At the same time, I think there is almost a tension growing between a new and recent generation of artists and curators in terms of how the work is managed in public places. The Royal College of Art and Design, not this year's graduating class, but the previous one, in the catalogue for 'The Straight and Crooked Way', they offered a collective statement talking about a wall between the artist and the curator at the moment and proposing a way in which the curator has to retreat and take higher ground rather than thinking about the choice of individual works and sequencing them in relation to space and the kind of narrative that is created that way. Instead the curator steps back and lets the artist chose amongst themselves their own peers in some cases and as I think they saw it, the curator then becomes the spokesperson in some way like an impresario. I think there are some areas where this is going on very strongly. Artists have either felt betrayed by museums or abandoned in mid-project due to lack of funds, or the museums and kunsthalles themselves don't have the resources to deal with, in particular with media-based work and nobody knows what they get into when they start out with it and whether it's a question of sound spill, or the hiring of equipment or whatever, and it is producing a lot of angst and tension. So I think that if the curating is changing, institutions are struggling to keep up. There have also been a lot of alliances made, I am thinking of the generation of Pierre Huyghe and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, and the alliances they have made with one or two curators and how that has infiltrated into this whole set up. I think it is different than say the Harry Szeemann, Kasper König model. But if one is looking back fifteen years to that generation, who were the first really prominent curators and

who were really independent curators for most of their lives, there are only a handful of them. They were all men and operated in certain ways and built coteries around them, and given that institutions had few curators in house who could deal with the very contemporary they provided the liaison and the means to this. Quite often they worked outside institutions. I am thinking of 'Westkunst', or shows like that. In this country in particular, there are fewer independent curators, partly because of the way museums and independent spaces work, but at the same time I think curators are more removed from artists here, in large part, than they are in Europe. Curators spend their time with board members, that kind of structure, much more than being in the mix of artists. Maybe it's also because the main places where artists congregate are either Los Angeles or New York, a little bit in Houston, a little bit in Florida, but for curators working in other places that kind of access, which a European curator would have, is not there and I think it is creating very different kinds of responses.

PON: Do you think that is because of a market-led culture here, as opposed to elsewhere? Ten or fifteen years ago, people like Hans Ulrich Obrist or Jens Hoffmann or Nicolas Bourriaud would have began curating independently into certain spaces and with particular artists, and those spaces were not commercial in any way. For example, fifteen years ago, in France for example, there wasn't a major market.

LC: Yes I think so. I tend to think that Jens has modelled himself, in part, on Hans Ulrich. I have known him for a while and he worked for me before he really began and I have watched how he has evolved, and I think Hans Ulrich has looked very much at Harry Szeemann and Kasper König above all. He is also very responsive to the situation and it has come out as a wholly different thing, and his interests are somewhat different. I think his interest in publications and his growing interest in architecture are different, but broadly speaking it's not such a different model.

Everything is exponentially larger of course, more institutions, the spectrum is broader, the number of artists as players. I mean everything in that sense, but although, while that's true there are a remarkably small number of players, artists, whatever, who really dominate the centre. Maybe fifteen years ago, there would be two or three institutions, just as there would be two or three magazines that were absolutely where it was at, and you always knew you had to see the programmes there. I mean, for a time the Kreeger had a really great programme and one would see every show there if you possible could. I don't think there is anywhere like that now. You might go to anywhere to see something or you might go to Avignon for example. It is so dispersed and it is very hard to know in advance exactly how to plot this. Nobody has the budgets to travel in this kind of way. That also means that a lot gets known about second-hand, through magazines, through discussion, but it's not so easy to watch those trajectories as it was in the eighties and certainly the seventies.

PON: Do you think that may have something to do with current mobility of curators, in that they are spending a lot of time curating temporary events, or biennial-style, large-scale exhibitions?

LC: Yes, but I think that was very true of the seventies. Artists moved and did their work when they got there. It was cheaper to fly an artist than the work, or the work could only be made in situ. I am thinking about early Lawrence Weiner, Germano Celant shows and that kind of practice. It is said at the moment that curators can travel, critics can't.

PON: Are there any critics?

LC: That's a good question! (Laughs) There is that kind of mobility, but there are only a few people working that way I think and somehow my sense was it was rather like New York in the sixties where there was a relatively small number of artists

working very closely together and the debate is cross-bred show by show, and you can see one responding to another. It's sufficiently tight and closed, but it builds very fast and it builds out of reaction, reaction. I don't think that's true now even if there are a small number of people they are working in a dispersed field and I don't think it's working quite like that. There is a lot of repetition.

PON: Why do you think that is?

LC: Partly because everyone wants Hans Ulrich to do something there, or they want Maurizio Cattelan to intervene in the situation. In the same way that cities building museums want a Bilbao-effect. Maybe that is predictable, but there is a need to have a known quantity, rather than to seeing how the next model might evolve, how to contribute to that?

PON: Where would you situate your own curatorial practice in relation to this development?

LC: I think I see it as really grounded in the specifics of each occasion, so the work I do at DIA I wouldn't do somewhere else, because it comes out of a very particular set of circumstances; the institution's own history, its focus on individual artists, its interest in long-term projects. All of that makes for a certain kind of programming. When I worked on the 'Carnegie International, 1991' with Mark Francis, we made it very much in relation to that exhibition in that city and of all those biennials or big, mega-shows, it is the only one located in a museum, and Andrew Carnegie's philosophy about why he was collecting or fostering contemporary art, whereas Frick his partner was collecting old masters and how that really shaped the evolution of that nexus of Library, Natural History Museum etc. That was immensely fascinating to me. We spoke to all the artists and chose artists in relation to that dynamic. That was the first really big show I worked on, and probably quite influential. I

spent a lot of time going through the history of the 'Carnegie International', looking at other types of shows of that kind and I think that shaped a lot of what I thought about, of being responsive to a situation knowing something about the parameters, not just the audience but the infrastructure itself and its physical usages. So although I occasionally do shows in other places, and I know when one is doing that one is not in touch with an audience, the host institution is. So the responsibilities are different and the thinking about the show needs to be different and crafted in relation to what you see as the opportunity and what the brief is. I suppose also teaching at Bard College of Art in Curatorial Studies, but retrospectively thinking it through and being somewhat sceptical about whether in fact it's useful and what its goals are and how it shapes students, that's also been very important. I have started to construct histories or get to know exhibition histories and practices by doing that, and also because of working with the younger generation who think differently, and their opportunities are different.

PON: It seems to me that one of the key developments in the last fifteen years has been, whether this has to do with the professionalisation or the education of curating, that curators have begun to talk more about curating as opposed to really talking about the work itself. Would that be an aspect of most curatorial programmes that you have had experience of or even at Bard?

LC: One of my caveats about curatorial studies is that students on the whole don't have enough art history. There is plenty of discussion about curating and there is not enough knowledge of recent art and that is probably reflective of my own interests and background. So it's very hard to get a balance. On the other hand I think that shows are received with very little sense of what the curatorial issues are. I was at a conference at the Getty last weekend on and around the Minimalism show that's there and dozens of people said why is it in the Isozaki MOCA building, why isn't

it in the 'Temporary Contemporary' space? It would have been much better, it's much bigger, is the kind of space that those kinds of artists like. It is a really simple response. The climate controls in the 'Temporary Contemporary' are not of a standard that would allow for museum loans and probably not for private collectors. It's impossible to bill it there. It's a simple mistake and what a basic thing to think of, or to know, or to realise and it doesn't even enter into the discussion for most people. Oddly enough, for all there is of thinking about curatorial issues, some of the central tenets of what it means to make a show don't even get registered. On the other hand you make a show about early Picasso, you should know from the beginning obviously, you should know that you can't borrow the *Sultan Pot* because that picture can never be lent - therefore thinking about how to make a show when the key work is not going to be there. Those kinds of things don't even really get discussed, or a better case would be the Lee Lozano show that's just been at PS1. She made one really, really important work, these eight to ten panels: the wave paintings. She spent years on that and they are not there. There is no real acknowledgement in the show that they're not there and I can't really see the point in doing the show if you can't get that and it then changes the artist's reputation, the understanding of the work. Those things really, that's the area where somehow the larger discussion of curatorial issues hasn't caught up. Another instance would be the Roy Lichtenstein show at the Hayward recently, people came away thinking Lichtenstein is so interesting after all, but it is such a poor selection or they didn't have the means to get a show with key works because of the costs to do that, but the artist comes off badly again, the work is evaluated as if it is the best possible selection of that artist's work, when it simply isn't. In my view it is not an appropriate show of Lichtenstein's work for London, it may be fine for somewhere like Louisiana, but it isn't appropriate in one of the key cities for the work where those representations are going to be shown for a period of time. Those are the issues, which interest me more and more.

PON: Do you think that may have something to do with the prioritisation of the idea that the group show is now seen as the serious work of the curator?

LC: Yes, there's that. There is the pressure on institutions to get high attendances therefore doing shows with name artists. The Impressionism effect is here, every conceivable show that can be titled to include Impressionism is, because museums do it again and again, or Van Gogh or Picasso, or whatever. That's killing opportunities for making more research-oriented shows of less fashionable subjects. It's also I think impacting on catalogues. If the Met does a show of Milanese armour, all the people of the world who are specialists in that field will probably be brought together in some way to contribute. That is not true of contemporary art or even the late Modern field. It just doesn't work like that and I guess the other big subject we haven't touched upon is the separation between the academy and the museum, which is very great in my view. There are a few curators who have the time, means or whatever to contribute significantly to scholarship on the topics or to the individual artists they are working on. Most of the important writing is coming out of the academy. Each is scornful of the other, particularly here in many ways. It is a very counterproductive situation. There is much less crossover than there is in early periods from Renaissance studies right down to the nineteenth century.

PON: Two shows, which were influential to my own practice, were 'If You Lived Here You'd be Home Now' curated by Martha Rosler and Group Material's 'Democracy'. Could you tell me a little bit around the background of those shows and maybe in terms of the influence in New York at the time? They are key shows for many artists and curators of my generation.

LC: Not first hand. I think they were done at a time when the DIA building on 22nd Street wasn't operating. That's not true, it may have just opened. There was the 'Discussions in Contemporary

Culture', that was still central to DIA at that point and there was a way in which projects were still very much artist driven in large part. Artist driven and implemented activity was possible and I think they came out of that and the programme hadn't been codified in the way that it became later. So there was money for symposia. From the early nineties it became very difficult to get funding, the kind of funding that put together symposia really tried up. Oddly enough at a time when money for education became very available, nonetheless this kind of funding was much harder to find and that was one the reasons why the symposia stopped in a sense. Also, in their place we set up two lecture series, one where there was a lecture on each exhibition or project delivered by usually someone with an academic background, and in parallel a series of artists on artists, where artists talk about an exhibition or an artist within the collection and they have been hugely popular. The Lehmann series are the academic series, which then get published and the artists on artists don't. That is very deliberate; because most artists wouldn't talk so they enter into it a different way and they have been great. Maybe it is also because critical studies got going here more in the nineties, so the raison d'être for the symposia wasn't so critical when there were so many other places doing it by that stage and there seemed to have been a kind of block where people were kind of saturated to some extent.

PON: It also seemed to me, from a distance, that a lot of the artists that were making so called 'socially engaged' work in the eighties, early nineties, particularly in New York, were multi-tasking across disciplines?

LC: Yes, it is also that New York real estate is so expensive. There are certainly colonies of artists, but they are in Williamsburg or elsewhere. They are not in Manhattan. They have been forced out and I think that is reflective of what galleries do. A lot of young artists go to Los Angeles. It is a more sympathetic and sustaining environment. There are more galleries

really nurturing younger artists. The dialogue is better and artists chose to teach it. Los Angeles always reminds me of London, its schools are important, the market isn't so important until recently and it had that kind of dispersed network through artists and some galleries, but here it is market dominated and always has been. It builds a different infrastructure.

PON: What other curators where you looking at when you became a curator?

LC: I didn't quite decide in such a direct way. (Laughs) I was teaching at London University in Soho through the eighties and writing, doing very little curating and I guess after seven or eight years of education I decided to move on. Art history in Britain was moving very much into a social art history and I felt more and more removed from artists' practices and I wanted to get closer rather than farther away, so I came here on a fellowship at the Smithsonian Institute and with that was offered the 'Carnegie International', which seemed much closer to where I wanted to be. There wasn't really a lot of planning, but having started that it worked better for me.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents, or precursors have been an influence on your practice as a curator?

LC: Seeing Kasper König's big show 'Westkunst'. I spent a lot of time in that and probably Kasper as much as anyone and probably also because he was very close to the artists he worked with. The priority was on realising the project, working with the artist to get things done to an optimum and my loyalties are to start with the artist and the artwork and grow out from that.

PON: When you moved to New York were there any particular spaces that interested you?

LC: Not as much as with what I probably saw in some European institutions. Julian Haiman's programme at Kreeger was interesting. DIA itself was enormously interesting to me because it focuses on individual artists on long-term projects. I was always interested in keeping commitment to certain artists, so it wasn't about doing one show with an artist and never seeing them again. In large part from Thomas Schütte to Juan Muñoz to Diane Thater, I maintained contact with those artists and maybe write later on or we do something in another context together, so I guess I am interested in how my generation and a little younger gets sorted out and contributing to that, so working with them again and again not quite in a Rudi Fuchs way, nonetheless keeping up and being very aware about what they are doing and keeping discussion going.

PON: One of the things I believe you are saying is that you are mourning the loss of the study and a scholarship within curatorship and the idea of a certain level of understanding in a deep way for the specifics of an artist's practice and their work that may have been lost?

LC: There is enough to do that, that can go on with other kinds of curating, other kinds of thinking. I wouldn't say it is not the most important reading, but should be one factor amongst a number of different styles and theoretical positions. I am also getting better at working individually and I haven't written any theoretical pieces of any consequence. If I can do anything, it's probably through working in very intense and in depth situations and writing out of that or in relation to that in someway, whereas other people have great gifts for bigger theoretical overviews. I think one also validates the way one thinks and the possibility of a working space.

PON: When you edited *Visual Display: Culture Beyond Appearances* with Peter Wollen, there was an aspect of that book that was about

the politics of display and how forms of display effects the meaning of that which is displayed?

LC: That is all about how the works get situated, presented, framed. An artist who has been very important to me, I suppose and I have worked closely with and continue to do so with is Jorge Pardo and getting the Pardo project done at DIA, the bookstore, the lobby, and the way Jorge blurs and crosses over. It's a complex project, going through three and four iterations in that space with him and looking at what else he does and continuing to talk with him, that brought up to date some of the issues that came up in the symposium and book that Peter and I put together. I have always been interested in the Wünderkammer and the different strands that go into making up the museum display, but I see that as very connected if you are really focusing on putting a project on view and need to know something, or you need to be very conscious of how it is being framed, both literally and discursively.

PON: Considering now that DIA has its new exhibition space for the DIA collection in Beacon, is the direction of the organisation changing?

LC: It is critical that we re-open the Chelsea space. To me it is very important that we have a very contemporary programme to constantly throw light on the collection and without that kind of dialogue, I think a collection can get bored. The art will be enhanced by a constant kind of reciprocation between what's going on now and also we understand the past always in relation to the present and it is the artists of the present that make us re-read the art of the past. For me, that is absolutely crucial.

PON: How important were the living artists in the installation of their work at Beacon?

LC: As much as they wanted to be. Hanne Darboven, whose work I have displayed twice now, leaves it to me. Richard Serra, very intensely, from choosing the space and so on, Richard is very hands on, so it was the full spectrum. In the beginning, with showing them the building as soon as we found it, to see what they felt about it and obviously everyone liked it, it was hard not to, and getting their input in the beginning, where their work would be, what they would need and in some cases what was possible to show. Fred Sandback worked up there for months. We have a lot of Sandback and he used it as a kind of studio/ laboratory, which was great.

PON: Do you see DIA Beacon as a museum?

LC: Yes, it is a museum and was intended primarily to put the collection on view and to put it on view in a long-term way, partly because some of those works just can't be turned over quickly but also because I think also because you make the decision to make the journey to go there. You give up time and you go there to focus on that. You don't drop in casually, but that was Judd's philosophy, and Judd's philosophy informs DIA and should continue to in a very direct way. I go to the Frick Collection probably once a year, maybe not much more, but I go because I know where everything is and I am in the mood to go see some of those things and I think that's fine if Beacon functions somewhat in that way. Then if the programme here also makes one re-think things up there, maybe you will go back up there to look at them again in another way. There are many different audiences obviously for Beacon, but it's that informed audience that's returning again with time and focus, we are keen on.

PON: It did remind me of Judd's idea of having to take the journey to Marfa, Texas before you are ready to see the work. Is that a similar idea?

LC: I think, if one had to single out one artist, Judd's thinking was at the route of DIA: from the whole idea of single artist museums or buildings or whatever, to in-depth, long-term focus on works. Judd articulates better and earlier than anyone the reason for converting anonymous or vernacular spaces, why they work so well. He had an extraordinary ability to do that and that's informed by Judd and he laid it out in a way that one can use it as a model.

PON: With the increase in the number of curatorial training programmes, do you think there is still a necessity for these types of courses?

LC: I think they have different values. The Royal College of Art & Design is quite different. I spent some time there, looking at that, but I know Bard best. I think that one of the things that Bard does is offer students, people from Eastern Europe, South America, Asia, the opportunity to be on a course like that and they go back and find good jobs in major museums or whatever. There are very few professionals trained in those parts of the world, which is not to say that there are not good people operating, but the chance to spend two years in a concentrated way, thinking and being amongst colleagues and having access to professionals in the field is really valuable, so I think that is one of the things that Bard does that's very useful. Half of the graduates can be from abroad, sometimes more, and I think courses like that are key and for North Americans, it is depending on what a person wants to do. If you want two years to really think about this, to put your head inside it and to have good contacts and opportunities, it does that. It doesn't lead to an interesting job in a museum, there are so few. The students who have done best are the ones that are prepared to go to 'out of the way' places, where they can actually work in a fairly active way. The ones that really want to live in New York are evermore destined to find it difficult.

PON: In 1992, Liam Gillick wrote an essay for *Art Monthly* in response to the opening of the course at the Royal College of Art and Design, and he warned of what he suggested could become a Betty Ford style clinic for failed art dealers and gallerists, but what he may have overlooked was the number of artists who were willing to be involved in the course?

LC: Liam himself has such an interesting history. I think artists, have in part, felt the need to. In the way in which artists like Judd, in the sixties, moved from a singular object to a space that contained it in order just to make their work and allow it to be seen appropriately, there is some of that impulse, which is similar now.

END OF TAPE

CATHERINE DAVID

Paris, 14-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How would you describe your current curatorial practice as distinct from other curators?

CATHERINE DAVID: I mean it's so different, but I'm quite sure we could find a number of similar practices and I could be very immediate and say I have probably more time than other people, or I give myself time. For me it is a luxury to be able to concentrate to go, to go back and I think it's the only way you can really begin to understand a certain number of things even if this research is more and more articulated or connected to the works I did earlier with Hélio Oiticica, that is coming from a non-European background, I think it's something so new and when I'm really trying to think a little bit or articulate a certain number of facts I feel that it has to do with the non-European and or non-Western model.

PON: Do you think there are key moments in the development of curatorial practice in the last fifteen to twenty years?

CATHERINE DAVID: It's difficult to see very precisely when you're involved, because you're, you know sometimes you have an envelope of historical time, personal time and so on and so forth, but I would say that in the last fifteen, maybe twenty years what was the most obvious for me at least was more and more instrumentalisation and more overlap between economical interest, and let's say artistic interest and in a way more and more fights, if you understand fight with a small f, keeping honest in order to work meaningfully and not just aligning one thing after the other, one new after the other, and of course also a lot of fighting in order to in a way impose the interlocutors you wanted to have, so this for me was really what I would really underline and I think that the reason is that these days you can see, just think in Paris, you know you can see that in a way you have a kind of emulation between Centre George Pompidou and Foundation Cartier which I find extremely questionable, not that any of these two positions are illegitimate, it's very important to have polarity, different insights and articulations of what's happening today, but my question is more why is Centre George Pompidou feeling obliged to align themselves with Foundation Cartier and so on and so forth, and I think this is really a problem when I see less and less places where there is really space and time for thinking, space and time for really

discussing aesthetical practices or by definition experimental ones, eventually a conflictive one and so on and so forth. This is the only question I have, for the rest people can do whatever they want.

PON: I mean you've worked both independently as a curator and also worked as a curator within institutional organisations. Do you think there's a major difference between those two activities?

CATHERINE DAVID: It's difficult to say too, I mean in a way I think respectively I worked more for institutions, and 'Documenta' is also an institution, so even if there is really an outside maybe it would be more appropriate to say that I found maybe more in the last fifteen years I always found a way of working on things I was interested in, although it would be in an institution or outside, or in between sometimes. On the other hand I think that due to the economical situation I don't see that independent curatorial practice is necessarily the guarantee for being deeper or more original or, because you know when you see that people have to make a living and particularly it could be that under certain conditions of course you have more freedom in an institution meaning that you have more time, you have more money relatively and I think that an exhibition like the Hélio Oiticica project at Jeu de Paume, it was not an exhibition it was really a project involving many different partners in the production, institutions but also in Brazil and we co-produced with, at that time with Witte de With in Rotterdam with other institutions such as the Tapies Foundation and there were really many, many involved in the project. When you think about the time it takes, when you think about the catalogue you produce, when you think about the long research into the archive and so on and so forth, I doubt it's a project which could be possible independently, not that there is no money but there is no interest, or they want, you know it would be very difficult to impose such a project for this private money, so again I think the discussion is quite, we have to be a little subtle. On another hand when I look at the programme of big institutions whether it's the Museum of Modern Art in Bilbao or the Tate or Reina Sofia in Madrid, I would make a distinction, a special case for MACBA in Barcelona, which I find is an exception, a big machine and a very, very strong and intelligent and ambitious director, but for the rest I

think it's disappointing and boring and I wouldn't like to be in them, speaking frankly.

PON: Are there any past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents or precursors that have been an influence on your practice?

CATHERINE DAVID: I think it would be very difficult to say because I think I feel more in debt to writers or people who work close to artists or people who are able to read, to articulate a situation out of a different kind of material, different kind of things, so frankly I couldn't make so many curators also because I mean it's one thing to, you know, of course we all have a minimum sympathy for a certain number of major figures, but in that case we could go very far in the past to the nineteenth century but we are working in such a different situation that I would say that I feel more inspired by people who are let's say original enough, courageous enough, or doing what they feel they have to do even when certain times it's ending but I will never do that because it's not necessarily what I'm very involved with, but I can be inspired by somebody who is working intensively and generally able to impose a different view in a moment when you're such strong flattening of the scene, but I don't have any curator from the sixties or seventies, it was more like a dynamic, more a situation, more a heterogeneity of voices.

PON: In *Conventions in Contemporary Art*, published by Witte de With in 2002, you said that: 'There are two realities about contemporary curatorship. One is instrumentalisation and spectacularisation of art…' and 'the second reality of contemporary art has to do with the development of contemporary practices into fields of exploration that are not necessarily related to art history'. Do you think that these realities are still prevalent and can you expand upon what you meant by these realities further?

CATHERINE DAVID: I'm afraid that the situation is not extremely different. We still have a kind of, if not opposition, but two speeds, two realities, two species to an extent and after that I see that it's more and more difficult to, unless you're really, and I'm not saying it's impossible, unless you really define and say very clearly you are more and more working in the dominant art scene I see more and more

difficult to impose certain ways of working, certain ways of questioning which are not immediately ending in a beautiful object or a simple idea for something simplistic and so on and so forth, but you know on this level I mean I don't want to be misunderstood, I'm not a pessimist and I think that you still have a certain number of very strong brains, people who are extremely articulate and sharp and want to discuss, want to propose, the question is what kind of space, and by space I don't mean necessarily just physical space, and what kind of space are we able to open, to sustain and to impose to a certain extent, and this of course allows you a certain number of specificities which are probably attached to what we call visual arts practices, but I'm afraid it's a situation which we could discuss with people who are writing, people who are filming, people who are working with the human body, with dance performers and so on, so I think that really this, this question is not so new. I think it's going on for really too long no, but it's more or less where we are, but it's for me it's like sometimes it's close to boring because I'm saying that for such a long time, but what you see developing, each time you see a new space, ninety-nine times out of a hundred it's a new brand big museum even when we know that a certain number of practices are not at all fitting in for this kind of thing and so on and so forth, so it's similar the question is still there, the problem is still there.

PON: You also said that you prefer 'staging events' to making exhibitions in order to de-emphasise the idea of an exhibition and stress the possibility of alternative models. What did you mean by this in relation to your own practice?

CATHERINE DAVID: I think for me you know it's quite clear that when you, as soon as you say, the word exhibition immediately or un-immediately, consciously or unconsciously people are waiting for the worst paintings on the wall, even when they are not very clear about what is a painting today, and at the worst something on the walls and on the floor. This is just my experience; unfortunately, so there is a problem with the word and there is also the problem I have in many so-called exhibitions that I am invited to. When you enter you really have the problem if you don't understand if you are too late something happened which has gone, or you are too early and it didn't begin yet, so there might be a problem there in terms of the concept.

I mean I don't know, how do you articulate something clearly in a space, especially when you have something that is to do with time and space. It is an event. I don't think women get something like exhibition which has to do with time and space event, so if it's not really an exhibition but if it's something which is conceived for lasting between a few hours and a few weeks it has to be articulated, and here is the beginning of complex things because of course it can go with mega, but it can go also with micro - tools like for instance being very clear about the programmes, being very clear with the timing. I'm getting more and more nervous now in any museum place I go when I can see how the timing of a video piece or a moving image, because if it's three minutes and I will wait for the beginning but if it is three hours, it has to be very clear for the people when they enter in at the beginning, the second when you have now exhibitions it's the position where the total time of running of the tapes, it's more than two days it could be possible, I don't think you have to be a genius for thinking about that, that people can have a CD, a DVD or a tape they can rent or they can take and give back or whatever, it could be those kind of things, and after that I mean it has to be, now I would like to develop this kind of thing on a more sophisticated way, but I consider that what we try to articulate at 'Documenta' on one of the days one of the guests, so articulating performance discussing activities, the filming of it, the archive of it, a minimum divide for space where people were understanding from the beginning that something would happen at a certain moment, but it was not happening yet when they were there at ten o'clock in the morning and they could have documentation, they could see, I mean this could be, reworked on much more sophisticated levels because 'Documenta' it's a big machine and I, I'm working on a smaller format at the moment and so on and so forth, it's not at all impossible.

PON: I mean at the With de Witte you had a very clear and cohesive programme on projects with artists working from a position of periphery, or shall we say none, appealing to non-Western artists. What were your objectives, problems and achievements within such a programme?

CATHERINE DAVID: I mean if I knew I would tell you but I'm afraid what I, the few things I really, that I could grasp from a few

articles, from people I spoke with were extremely for me irrelevant, like when you are showing people from Beirut they think it would be better to have people from Morocco because we have Moroccan here, not understanding that there is a dramatic gap between the people who are in the country, in the Netherlands and what's happening in the countries and the kind of paradox because what's happening in the countries is less conservative than what's happening in the communities who are living in a closed circuit outside, not in, not everywhere, not here, not in France but in the Netherlands due to the history of this very specific Moroccan community who came here in '62. They all came from, really they are all together, they are all very countryside people, very low in mode of education blah blah blah, so this I would have liked to discuss. One thing, another critique was it was not, it was too difficult, another level of critique I got from many other places as well as the Netherlands was that the programme was not visual enough and this was also with 'Documenta' when I was having a philosophical and ethical discussion because as far as I know it was probably defective vis a vis the Baroque or spectacular, that's this for sure, of course, but you know visible at the end, you know there were things to look at, and okay the difference of course maybe it's not visible if you look at it on the table and if you look on the wall and this way, but you know it's a kind of discussion we could have with a certain number of my colleagues you know and also that the art was involved. Anyway for the question, but it's now close to an historical debate that most of the artistic and aesthetic production of this century was not about the visual as that which is necessarily at the core, it's not the all of it, it's also something we could discuss for times which are much before the twentieth century, but let's stay in the twentieth century if not we would, it would take far too long, so you know a mix of let's say the usual reactions you have against certain very contemporary kind of practices, plus the fact that some of these practices were coming from countries or places which were not the expected ones, and plus, and this for me is more interesting, plus critics for instance when we had the Beirut event claimed that it was not authentic, this is not Arab because there was no calligraphy and no abstract painting, or either it's not authentic or this is not, either it's too modern or whatever, and again this is due to a complete lack of knowledge of the reality of the countries and of the places.

PON: I mean because of the ephemeral nature of exhibitions, for an example like 'Documenta X' even, much of the representations of an exhibition, of the staff gets kind of handed down and a second degree of discourse. Do you think that the impact of the kind of the ephemerality of exhibitions ultimately affects it or produces kind of a repressed history in relation to curating?

CATHERINE DAVID: It's difficult to say because, and of course you also have to take into consideration as to what exhibition? It's clear that with 'Documenta X' there is a level of visibility which is much higher than any project you can organise at Witte de With for sure, it's also very interesting to see that after so many massive critiques at the very beginning of 'Documenta X' you had such evolution of the discourse that sometimes for me it's a little close to confusing because you know it's going from one extreme to the other, it's a little disturbing because I have myself a few critics, but I won't take the critics without question, but it's clear that you have exhibitions which are more visible, more discussed than others. On the other hand I'm not upset if you think about the history of the twentieth century we could really think of a number of exhibitions which lasted from a few hours to a few days, which were actually important, which were kept in the memory, in the collective memory even if sometimes it's closer to a phantasm or fantasy than to any reality.

PON: This is due to how those exhibitions would be inscribed into history in written form?

CATHERINE DAVID: I think some have been inscribed into history, so I don't think that there is any frustration but I think the exhibition is not a book, but I think it's, the way I am thinking is not too much that it has to be at it's minimum to be a script and you find from a number of ideas and after you look at the work, at the other space and it seems to me simple and extremely complex, so it's a lot of work but I think that I don't feel frustrated either when people don't see all of the work, it's like sometimes in theatre if you don't see all the work I don't think it's a problem.

PON: One of the interesting things for me in relation to 'Documenta X' and also 'Documenta XI' is that although they're very, very, very different projects there an interest when you kind of expand beyond this idea of something that could be experienced over 100 days, for example you would have to be there for a hundred days to experience its totality and with a lot of the video works, were you know kind of much too long in order for you to experience it and encapsulate more. Was that a conscious decision on your part to extend it beyond this kind of momentary event experience?

CATHERINE DAVID: It was very, it was very conscious and very clear from the beginning and we thought of it like a construction in concentric circles, something at the end which would be the exhibition you had to expect and you have to do because at the beginning I really propose to have the localised document and it was a big scandal with the Mayor of Kassel and he said no your contract says you have to do it here pronto and okay but I think it was a good idea for later, you know so let's say what you had was the exhibition in Kassel, the book which would be a publication of course dealing with the ideas and the works in the 'Documenta X' with different perspectives and also I really wanted to deal with the fact that the book is two dimensional and the exhibition was three dimensional. I also wanted to deal with 'Documenta', whether for better and for worse, is concerning many more people than those who are visiting, people who have come very far so the structure of the book was from the beginning sold for people who won't have wanted have seen the show so that is something meaningful, all the original perspective segments we tried really so that it could be understandable to people who were not in, and also thinking that you know that it's a big machine so you have not luxury but good conditions for working with such a good team, a very small team but a lot of intelligent energy, you have to give back so you have to do things that you wouldn't do on a smaller scale or in a museum, and one or two of these guests were in a way like you know showing or putting emphasis on the limits of what I call the borders of an exhibition, meaning that at the end of the twentieth century whatever you want, whatever you say you can't really at least seriously, you can't deal with the whole world so you have to make it understandable that you have certain black spots, and of course it

began with the number of people, ideas coming from geo-cultural places which were not included in 'Documenta X', but so we discussed this aspect of these practices which can't be encapsulated at an exhibition, so really I think this big 'Documenta' of 100 guests was really making visible that you had another experience, that you had a bridge with other places, other spaces, other discussions and it was for the first time in the history of 'Documenta' on the same day you are the discussion about technology. We had the discussion online three hours later, so you know from the beginning involving a number of people who were much more than the three hundred and fifty, I don't know thousand or whatever who visited 'Body and Flesh', I think the 'Body and Flesh' audience is part of the audience of 'Documenta' and this is something which is probably, which has to be more addressed than it was when 'Documenta' began at the end of the fifties, because at that time really communication was not so developed. This time you have really to think, I mean 'concentric circles' is not an ideal image but you have really to deal with the impact of 'Documenta' if people want to be megalomaniac you have to be precise and of course you have to develop adequate spaces.

PON: Was that the thinking behind the book as it seems to be the only 'Documenta' to deal with the history of Kassel and so on?

CATHERINE DAVID: Yes, yeah, it's something, something which is staying, it's something which is again looked at by people who were not able to come and so on and so forth and at the end you have many people who wanted to come and who are expecting something from 'Documenta'.

PON: You said in the short guide for 'Documenta X': 'what can be the medium purpose of a document and say when there are so many other large scale international exhibitions that need to be called into question'. Do you think that such shows are still necessary and does 'Documenta' need to be rethought as an institution?

CATHERINE DAVID: I think that where we are now I don't know so many places where you can work like you can work in 'Documenta', meaning of course you have many conflicts with the political, with the media, whatever, but nobody is telling you whom you have to invite and nobody

is discussing whom you will invite, you can also organise the budget the way you want and you don't have these cowards that you have in many other places, so I really consider that it's a place where you can really articulate, and the results are never what you will, never, it would be wonderful but they are close to what you expected but not too far let's say, and I believe there is, I see very few other let's say exhibitions or big exhibitions where you have such freedom and space for making a statement, surely not in Venice, and maybe the only biennial type exhibition to make a difference other than San Paulo, but I think it's a large scale exhibition which could be really, really refined but it is politically a long story, it's something very challenging in a mega city and all the history of let's say modern Brazil has been articulated and I think it's a major cultural place, so if they have a way of reclaiming a little bit of the production and conditions, I think it could be a very challenging exhibition. For the rest I mean I fear many big shows which are all looking the same and I'm not really interested so I think from all these things I think 'Documenta' is sometimes a bit isolated. I am very often in discussion in Germany and people really think that it's a space, a cultural space, German people they are so used to it that in a way they underestimate it.

PON: Does being involved as a curator or a director of 'Documenta X' ultimately impact upon how you thought about your own curatorial practice?

CATHERINE DAVID: Yes because in a way 'Documenta' is something between a museum and television, it's you know you have to be in all the spaces at the same time so you really have to be very, very precise not a mega-mania because I don't think you can control everything, but really you have to be very, very precise in terms of the way you articulate things on a big scale, and I think what I'm proud of is, even with this bigness we can make it possible to have different formats and different speeds and this is something you could see in the exhibition design, and of course when you learn, when you are able to deal with that after maybe a certain number of things are easier or becoming not so important, but again it's, for me it's very important to be able to be with big formats but also with very small.

PON: In an interview in 1997 with Robert Storr you said that you were trying to make clear that: 'we are working in a time of globalisation with 'Documenta'', so how was this made manifest in the exhibition itself or in the event itself?

CATHERINE DAVID: I think it's manifested again by trying to be non-exhaustive and saying it and making clear that to be exhaustive very fast without the tools or the dangerous phantasm of transparency that everything was accessible and it was understandable and it's probably the opposite to what's happening at the moment where we are confronted by more and more idiosyncrasies and complexities and that when you are not exhaustive you have to say it and to be pedagogical and to understand why it's so dangerous to be without being exhaustive, and with '100 Guests' it was really supposed to emphasise the impossibilities, or certain limitations of a global view these days.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making. How do you see your role as a curator and at what level of artistic production do you see your practice being involved in the process of art making?

CATHERINE DAVID: Well I don't, I mean I never, I never liked the discourse around the idea of the curator as an artist and I think it's very childish and I don't think it's very interesting. I think it's the work of editing, putting, articulating ideas, forms in a certain moment and I think it's nothing less nothing more, and after that you can be very intuitive or you can be very sharp and you can be less intuitive, sharp or deep, but again for me it's like putting things together and I like to do it with time, with space, with subtlety when possible.

PON: Do you think of yourself as an author or do you think of yourself with a certain amount of autonomy?

CATHERINE DAVID: Yeah but you know I mean in a way the authorship has to be written without any big A's or I think that if you say no it's also a little problematic because there is always an element of

authorship and after Barthes and Foucault we know it is complex, but again it is a shared activity.

PON: I mean how do you see your relationship with the artist that you work with, as you appear to develop a long-term relationship more recently with a lot of the artists over longer periods?

CATHERINE DAVID: Well it's really, I don't think it's something generic, eventually you have a methodology, a way of dealing with ideas, texts, activities, a way of approaching and sedimenting but after that you must mainly situations as you have human beings and it's never the same, you know with people you can work and spend a lot of time together, you have people you really like very much and would not go for holidays with and so on. It's very different, any artist is different, each comes with his or her own different articulation of intellect, affect, sensibility, and it is very diverse.

PON: You've been involved in both monographic shows, also large group exhibitions, do you think of the group exhibition as like the default button within curatorial practice? I'm being too metaphorical, but it's become like the main serious work of the curator with the curatorial discourse.

CATHERINE DAVID: If I think about my experience not necessarily because I really like to work on monographic shows, I really like to spend time, I really like to see the development of certain works over a long time so I don't really… when there is, when it's meaningful, when there is a necessity why not, but really recently I was not involved with the group show with so many artists, maybe twelve altogether, maybe fifteen people including filmmakers and video makers. The exhibition with people from Cairo and there were six so that was close to like six monographic shows. But why not, it's a very different, it's different because sometimes the difference, there's a difference depending on where you are working, you have places where in a way you have to do everything because people are not used to working over time for an exhibition, they are not used to such respect, they are not even used to see a curator coming back three times, they are scared at the beginning and they don't understand what you want.

PON: Are there other contemporary curators, other recent exhibitions you've found interesting on a curatorial level?

CATHERINE DAVID: Well I have to say that an exhibition I saw recently the exhibition 'Things we don't understand', in Vienna at the Generali Foundation organised by Ruth Noack and Roger Buergel and I really can't say I liked the whole show but they had very strong works and other ones I had more problems with, but in terms of installation I liked the show and I found the display very dry, and presented intelligently and you could really see how different viewers, different dwellers with different stories and different capacities would use it in a positive way, and after I don't, you know this is often the problem it's like when you go to movies sometimes you catch an idea or an image and after it takes time to remember it's very interesting because probably there are a few, not many, but a few other ones that are really like and stay with me and not necessarily all the time contemporary art exhibitions. When I can I go to visit the Louvre or even a more awkward historical museum so I can see something which is extremely exciting which is just about the display.

PON: It seems to me that just kind of in the last say twelve months three curators, yourself, Charles Esche and Maria Lind, who have been involved in a kind of 'new institutionalism', or this idea of being a creative institution with a flexible programme of documentary led practices and all three of you have recently departed from these institutions. Do you think that this critique of the structure of the institution itself has ultimately become too difficult?

CATHERINE DAVID: Well it's also, I think it's not easy to compare because the contexts are actually different, they are in different cities, even if maybe you could say that the Dutch contact and the Swedish and this thing after a certain amount of discussion with Charles are not so far in terms of social organisation and political climate, but it's probably to do with the fact that there is an impossibility at the moment for a municipality because these three cities are not New York or San Paulo and a small city like Rotterdam, Malmo or Munich, they can't see and they don't want to risk anything and they can't think outside of a populist frame, so they and so they

are very, very afraid of changing the format, they are very afraid of abandoning an exhibition space. I mean for me Witte de With was really on the one hand like a holy place because if people don't like it they don't go and you have so many places in Rotterdam that it is probably more interesting to move within the city because it's part of the idea that people move a lot, that you have a lot of space free which is the opposite to what you have here, and I'm really more and more convinced that when you are dealing with situations where you have extremely different groups of people, in the first stage at least you have to go to the people and you can't expect them to come to you.

It's more trying to work on being there for something on a very, very small level and being able to circulate ideas, imagery, in such a way that people can use it where they are and how they are at the moment, and this will be for me the alpha omega, so not to be bombastic, not to be teaching, you have schools for that, not to be giving people a bad, people do what they can and you can't expect they will come to you, especially when you are working in circumstances which are still very related to a certain dominant way of dealing with culture, consuming culture and so on and so forth, we have to be clear, so I think that this kind of discussion you have to be very ambitious, I mean the good meaning of it, you have to be very willing to accept to take risks, that it won't work just like that, you have to accept that it won't be immediately understood in terms of public image and what politicians like, and again I mean it's, I'm confidently sure that this is the way it has to be done.

PON: But it seems to me that within all three of your programmes, I know very, very different programmes, there seems to be a very clear curatorial director - identity embodied in the programme, which to me is a very good thing, but all three programmes also in various different ways receive this kind of local backlash and I know all three institutions were of a similar scale as well in terms of their size, and it just seemed to be kind of a shame that all three programmes happen to end at the same moment in time almost, and I was just wondering whether there was any kind of grand reason for that, maybe it's you know local politics, maybe it's kind of an inability to find a transmute and you take change and ultimately transform into something else on behalf of those three institutions?

CATHERINE DAVID: Yeah I think there is a mix of all these reasons probably, and on a more personal level I have to say that at least in Rotterdam what I saw, what I felt, it's just that it is extremely complicated because when I came I thought it would be very normal situation for me as a kind of a big-small city, or a small-big city, and working in concentric circles dealing with sometimes very complex situations where Rotterdam would be closer to Hong Kong, or to New York than to Amsterdam, which is true in a way for people dealing with big money, the banking and new technology and so on and so forth, but this would be in no way very challenging for me, so after that maybe I have to admit that I'm really much better in big cities, so not at all for the glamour because comparatively you are much more invisible in a big city, but I really like the way you can deal with people, I mean Belleville in Paris for me is much more fascinating than Rotterdam communitarian groups, you know sometimes here you have some frictions which are completely understandable and acceptable as long as there is no physical violence, that's something you have to expect with so many different people but this is more exciting for me, I feel more at home within that world. Yeah it's more my world.

PON: Do you think an artist should curate the next 'Documenta', which is of course the question that Jens Hoffmann recently proposed within his own curatorial project and publication with e-flux?

CATHERINE DAVID: You know I remember that we had a discussion, but very light, very basic discussion at the last Basel art fair, the one before last we had this discussion, and for me it's like a joke because why not, but I don't think it can be a recipe, it can't be the criteria because it's not enough to be an artist. What artist, some artists would be disastrous and so why not, but on another hand I accept I never understood very well all of the discussions about the fight between artist and curators because I feel that in my experience I have never seen artists who would work like that and do everything I wanted them to, they don't exist so maybe the difference is just between curators and promoters, it's a different thing but I think artists have to know what they are doing too.

PON: What is the difference between a curator and a promoter within the show?

CATHERINE DAVID: I think unless it's possible after you can play with words or you can also say that a good exhibition is a place for the work and the curator was actually well received, or polemical or visible or blah blah blah but they are also interesting for work. This is of course part of the game, but I think for me a curator is first of all motivated by a certain number of ideas and articulations and are ready to defend it and to impose it when necessary, and a promoter is more involved with efficiency and economics and so on and so forth, and I think it's very clear.

PON: Do you think that we should evaluate what good or bad curating is, or do you think that we can evaluate it, how would you describe the good curated exhibition, for want of a better term?

CATHERINE DAVID: No it's, I mean of course you can, you can value, you can establish a critical discourse about an exhibition and about curating, the question is of course with the critique as to for whom, for where and for how long, and after you have an immediate impact, you have more long term processes which are not so visible at the beginning and so on and so forth, so I think the beginning of it would be a minimum coherence in the ideas, a minimum precision, clarity, but in the presentation that's things there is a reason behind really got to keep it but that's another issue but there is a minimum coherence.

PON: I mean looking back retrospectively at 'Documenta X' now looking back, what was good about it and what would you have changed or would you change anything?

CATHERINE DAVID: I don't know what was good probably the re-opening of a certain number of perspectives, probably in it being an exhibition for a large audience, asking a number of questions which had nothing to do with vision or the new or trying to be a little serious so not to spectacularise, not to insist on very superficial debates and so on and so forth, and after that again I would have liked to do what I proposed from the beginning which was not possible to have that were constellations, so a sort of number of segments

developed in situ that I began to try to develop in Beirut after, so develop in situ when people have different challenges, different urgencies. I think it's sometimes not necessarily a different tradition, because we all have traditions and we all have now mixed and renegotiated tradition, so I don't think that the tradition is always for those who are not Western, we are all in between the renegotiation of tradition, but let's say paying more attention to what it means to make art in very different circumstances and it probably doesn't mean exactly the same thing unless you are very, either very romantic or neo-colonial or simplistic.

PON: There's probably a very obvious answer to this question, but what has urged you to work predominantly with artists from the Middle East or from Arab countries in the last say two to three years, three years?

CATHERINE DAVID: It began earlier with 'Documenta X' really, but let's say unfortunately for instance that one of the reasons is that even when we understood that there are the number of say intellectuals and artists speaking at or who are involved in discursive activities within the frame of '100 Guests' and one of the conclusions was that you don't know enough, you have to travel, it's not extremely difficult, but there you really have to deal with paradigms which have to be established and discussed, and probably even more difficult to negotiate than they are with a sort of number of works which developed in the sort of countries of South America or even Asia, so there are some reasons to that and how do you proceed. You can of course proceed and it's a kind of mainstream procedure which is extremely questionable and counterproductive which is to deal with people who are like they are, what I would call 'Canada Dry' people like Shirin Neshat who have a name and emanate with something like the country, which I find extremely dishonest, and doing work which is very superficial, very mediocre, but very immediate, and in a way it is an aestheticising cliché and if you don't want this kind of representation you have to work in a more real way to look at what people are doing, and so of course I am mostly motivated by a certain number of critical practices which are from my point of view contributing to the consolidation of critical places, and I prefer to speak about critical platforms and contributing to it if possible but

it is not easy and it could be more difficult, that's why I'm very active in my research, going to the library and to be in a discussion with a number of intellectuals and specialists and how to deal with more complex paradigms, the paradigm of modern, what is modern art in these countries, eventually entering into extremely complex debate, what is an academic art when there is no other space left, so what kind of negotiation? So if it's very complex, or let's say you know on the one hand kind of a very logical extension of 'Documenta' research and with limitations, not necessarily failure but limitations, there are therefore limits to the big exhibition, what is the limit, and if you really want to work on this subject you have to travel, it's another space, another way of working, another challenge, and of course it is not at all something completely unique or out of the frame of subjects I'm very interested in, I think it's one more chapter of the non-European modernity. Let's say the kind of folders you have to open and unfold, not researching things, or not digging for things, which never existed.

PON: Do you think that we need more biennials of international art today?

CATHERINE DAVID: Yeah I mean on the one hand you are really tempted to say ah we have just reached the limit with them and many of them I don't even go to because now I'm just fed up looking at all the same artists so I was getting tired as I have to use my energy in a more positive way, so this is one immediate, on another hand we have also to be, you have to admit that you have a certain number of places where there is nothing and it's an extremely legitimate demand from artists that they need spaces for showing, they need common categories, they need opportunities for meeting, so the question would be more how towards how to voice, and instead of one more biennial with all the negative aspects that they can have, instead how to manage a manifestation of a situation which is more fitting with what people are living at the moment, but apparently you see more and more biennials which have, are more and more the same and which are not necessarily fitting with the context unless you would consider that fitting with the context is playing the game of the dominant elite, playing the game of the rulers and so on and so forth. I've seen that in many opportunities it's extremely important not only to isolate a

few who are very clever, or well educated, or people had many, many opportunities for developing a certain form of signs, this is really also necessary but I think it's extremely important to deal with the rest of the cultural space.

PON: One of the critiques that is often directed at the international arena is, in a general context, that they're often curated by the same group of players and it seems that this kind of evolution of this kind of snowballing curatorial phenomenon seems to be kind of a by-product of the rise of the number of biennials?

CATHERINE DAVID: Whether it's a problem, I would say it's really that if we were looking at all the biennials which are active at the moment of course you have a certain number of biennials that are playing the curator's game of name dropping with the big shots, but you could see, and maybe it's less dominant, where you have younger people or where it is less expected or involving people from geo-cultural areas, so there are probably, I don't have one in mind at the moment but also and if you think about the 'Asian Pacific Biennial', or you see a certain of this, I never went but it seems like there is a very serious attempt in the scanning of what's happening in the region and to comment, to produce a discourse on it which is really the beginning, because if there is no discourse produced in the proper space and it's what is killing also the counter-production, there is a very big deficit in terms of production of discourse, so if you have no discourse in the proper space of invention I think it's extremely patronising for the worker, for the artist. And again what you are mentioning it's a fact and I think it's forming cultural tourism, which is not compatible with a certain kind of work.

PON: A certain kind of work?

CATHERINE DAVID: If you know the beginning of, you have to think if you have the will to go back if you want to understand. I can be very, very critical of what's happening in certain Arab countries, one I don't necessarily share the life of some of my artist colleagues or at least I admit that I did my own work, so I have to know a little bit what you are speaking about, so in the beginning it's something between a good journalist, research and so on.

PON: During the same period where we have had an increase in the number of international biennials we also have a kind of a parallel to increase the number of curatorial training courses, do you think that these post-graduate training courses have an impact on the critical discourse around curating?

CATHERINE DAVID: Yes and it's not often the case, there is a strong capacity of a critical discourse, of not just helping people to practise fast, so people are able to deal with the complex histories before they're able to deal with what happened and what didn't happen and you know not just identifying the few subjects that anybody would be able to identify.

PON: Do you think curating is something that can be taught or be learnt?

CATHERINE DAVID: Why not, but it seems to me that you have so many things involved in curating, from psychology to political knowledge, so it's really why not.

END OF TAPE

CATHERINE DE ZEGHER

New York, 11-11-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator yourself and is this a term that you're comfortable with?

CATHERINE DE ZEGHER: I didn't set out to become a curator, neither the function nor the word existed on the continent at the time but now the institution has it that I am a curator. In fact, I studied Archeology and Art History and worked as an archaeologist for almost ten years in excavation and the restoration of monuments in Greece and Belgium. One of those monuments was an old textile factory, where a group of young entrepreneurs, politicians, and art lovers wanted to start a Kunsthalle: The Kanaal Art Foundation. At first they asked me to be part of the process because of the building, and consequently I became one of the founders. More and more, I was involved with the artists on site, and literally taking care of them, you know, because all the other founders were men, industrialists and politicians without time, and I was the only woman. When the artists had to be lodged or needed just simple things, tools and food, it was mostly me doing it. After a while, I decided, well maybe I should just leave my other job and do this because I loved working with the artists and I was very interested in what they were thinking, making, and saying. I liked our discussions, and had meanwhile began to develop a kind of critique of archaeology, because it is so much about traces, but traces of a dead civilization or a dead culture, and I was missing the interaction with living people. I recognised that its analysis was basically constructed on hypothesis, and that working with the living creators of a culture was much more fascinating. At least, here I can speak with the artists and test out if my analysis contains some truth, if what I'm thinking about their work is really about what it is. Actually, one should remember that the word curator is derived from 'cura', the Latin word for taking care, and I feel that my becoming a curator quite literally stems from that. In any case, a few years later, others started to refer to me as a curator. In the beginning, it sounded odd, but over time I accepted what was slowly becoming a convention: OK, if that's what I'm doing, then I'm a curator. In short, I did not have the ambition to become a curator.

PON: So what was your first curatorial project or your first curated exhibition?

CDZ: Well from this you will understand that I would also have had a hard time defining a 'curatorial project'. When was the first project? As the Kanaal Art Foundation was founded in 1986, and I became its Director in 1988, the first project I organised was with the Brazilian artist Cildo Meireles. I continued to curate a lot of projects with artists from abroad, often from the margins, who were unknown at the time, and I was partly responsible for their gaining more international recognition. My first curated large exhibition was 'America. Bride of the Sun: 500 Years of Latin America and the Low Countries' at the Royal Museum of Fine Arts in Antwerp in 1992. To be able to understand the social engagement and convey the work of artists to larger audiences gave me great satisfaction. The work I did with emerging artists such as Gabriel Orozco, Mona Hatoum, Joelle Tuerlinckx, and Ellen Gallagher, introducing them to influential critics and collectors was a kind of launch enhancing their reception. So I know where much of this began, working with all of these wonderful artists in turn enhanced my understanding too. There was an amazing exchange of knowledge and also, very importantly, the time for that exchange. I essentially learned from them, and all this happened against my art historical background, and I discovered these new traces mostly by working through in relation.

PON: Are there any particular past curatorial models or precursors or predecessors that would have been an influence on your practice?

CDZ: Well, living in Belgium, I have to say that I was very affected by the 'Chambre d'Amis' exhibition of Jan Höet. I was in a different way taken by 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' of Jean-Hubert Martin. This exhibition project received a lot of criticism but it opened new horizons and this cannot be underestimated. I saw exhibitions of Harald Szeemann and liked what Kasper König was doing at Portikus in Germany and Chris Dercon at Witte the With in Rotterdam. I remember the founding of the FRAC in France, which achieved great work in the particular sense that they were focusing and elaborating in depth a singular project with artists in residence. The influence on my practice came from the art scene in Europe but my thinking was very much shaped by Anglo-Saxon art criticism in the United States and England. I increasingly considered the critical thinking in these two countries as much more at the forefront in analysing what art was, what

art can be, or what the relationship is between art and society, art and life, art and politics. It was a very exciting time.

PON: And would you have seen a differentiation between the type of curating that was going on in Europe say in the eighties and New York in the eighties or in America in the eighties?

CDZ: I wasn't really seeing that way. As I said, I didn't attach such importance to the notion of curating, so I wasn't really thinking of models. I was rather inspired by the writings of certain art critics, like Benjamin Buchloh, Rosalind Krauss, Jean Fisher, and Yve-Alain Bois, and also by the books of French philosophers. I was intrigued by Jacques Lacan and Gilles Deleuze and very interested in Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigary. In America, I became aware of the work of Judith Butler and Elaine Scarry. The feminist approach in general was a real revelation to me. Art historians like Griselda Pollock, Lisa Tickner, and later Carol Armstrong, Briony Fer, and Mignon Nixon were crucial interlocutors and artists like Bracha L. Ettinger, Avis Newman, Cecilia Vicuna, Nancy Spero, and Martha Rosler. These friendships were and still are a real inspiration, but the difference is that we had more time to just sit down and discuss issues. I am lucky to have wonderful curator friends like Catherine David and Elizabeth Macgregor. We used to spend a great time together but, unfortunately, now everyone is too busy. We would go to 'Documentas' together, and then Catherine would do her own 'Documenta', and Elizabeth would become the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, and all of that was absolutely marvellous, to see your friends growing into these positions. But what was nice about that generation is that that wasn't the goal, that just happened and it was great, but it was never conceived as a step towards more power. We were definitely not on a ladder, we were so very far from being on a ladder, we belonged to a generation that had its ambition some place else, it didn't lie there, it still lies more in the accumulation of knowledge, in a better understanding of society and politics, in this impulse or desire to change society, and I think all of us early on understood that when you are inside the power structure, your power to bring about that change actually can diminish. One would think the opposite to be true, that when you run those institutions you can actually achieve it, but that is only the case in smaller institutions, and I think it's why some of us have chosen to stay in

alternative and smaller non-profit institutions.

PON: Do you think that there have been any key shifts in contemporary curatorial practice within the last ten years? Is this a moment when things changed for you?

CDZ: The key shift is that curatorial practice has become professionalised. It used to be amateur in a way. My generation belongs in between the amateur and professionalised approach. We all studied art history, but were not working with history only; we were working with actuality and, at the start, nobody really knew where to place us, because contemporary art as such didn't then exist as a study, let alone as a practice, so we closely lived that transition. For example, when you were a lawyer, you were a lawyer, a professional; now being an artist is considered a profession. It is sometimes easy to forget but it really used to be different and more like you were doing your thing and you were a poet and a writer and an artist and it was all of that. Most of them couldn't live from it, some artists, of course, had this possibility, but a lot were also graphic designers or set designers in a theatre or teaching, they were doing all kinds of things. I have the impression that the step into the profession of curator occurred at the same time as into the profession of being an artist.

PON: Do you think that moment of the professionalisation, say in the late eighties or early nineties, do you think that coincided with the rise of kind of larger international biennial style exhibitions?

CDZ: Maybe, but I think that is later. The professionalisation happened first and because you had all these curators and artists, you had also a mushrooming of biennials, so I would say that it was a little later, towards the mid-nineties.

PON: You mentioned 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' by Jean-Hubert Martin, who was a curator who became very visible through that exhibition. One could say that was a moment where there was a shift away from this kind of idea of the curator as some sort of invisible entity, towards someone who was actually producing some kind of a global narrative.

CDZ: Right, right. Well, there were a few who were influential, like

Harald Szeemann, Kasper König, and Jan Höet, and they were all men! It took me a while to see that their work wouldn't be my model, not because they were men, but I was really looking for something else.

PON: So how would you describe your models then, as distinct from other curators?

CDZ: To begin with I would describe my model as being more of interaction, of conversation, of reciprocity, of relation. I like exchange and discussion as a base. People like Jean Fisher and Griselda Pollock were very important to me; well, a lot of the feminists, feminist artists, and I think maybe because they are much more exploring inclusion and mutuality. I always had a problem with this whole idea of authority, competition, and exclusiveness in the art world. That was not what I was interested in.

PON: You mentioned about the link between history and contemporary art, where it seems to be quite clear from the shows that I have seen here, is something that The Drawing Center has ambitions to make these links between the past and the present. Do you think that that historical work is and should be relevant to current curatorial practice?

CDZ: Of course, yes, when you are able to combine both, and I hope that's what I'm doing, and that's why The Drawing Center was so attractive to me, because it seemed to me that they were doing something potentially very fruitful, even if it was in an ad hoc way, but they were presenting in their program both historical and contemporary exhibitions. In fact, in the last seven years, I have significantly developed this mission and I really established this juxtaposition as a principle, and my ambition is to build out the relation between historical and contemporary exhibitions in a larger institution. Now our space is too small, but I still juxtapose historical and contemporary work in the main gallery and in the smaller drawing room across the street, and we have either here a historical exhibition related to a contemporary there or vice versa. This is not chance, expedience, or simply decorative variation, it brings forward the possibility of what we could call 'deep conversation'. However, it requires research and more time and commitment than many institutions can afford. I like intercultural and intergenerational juxtapositions,

in space and in time, like Rosemarie Trockel (Germany) across from Copper Thunderbird (Norval Morriseau)(First Nations) or Richard Tuttle across from Tantra drawings from India (some people even thought Richard curated it…), as they can so profoundly inform each other. It made people inquire where does abstraction come from, why are these anonymous Tantra works not in the art world and Tuttle's work is in the art world? I like to bring up these different sets of questions; I want people, when they leave the exhibitions, to try to find out more from history, as for example in 'Ocean Flowers', which was about the beginning of photography in connection to drawing. I hope that people going home research the nineteenth century and find out more about the period: the connection between art and science, etc…. I cannot emphasise the importance of those relationships enough, I even have a sense that when history is lacking, there is a feeling of emptiness, of works of art just floating there. It seems like you can't connect them to anything and then the thinking doesn't go further, and you increasingly lose perspective separated from the possibility of forming a critique of contemporary society.

PON: The Situationist Internationale is a reference point for you, because I know you did projects about their history.

CDZ: Well, I worked with Constant and at some point he was part of the Situationist Internationale. He belonged to a generation who just after the war had the awareness that they confronted a tabula rasa, an empty space after destruction. Many European countries had suffered from the catastrophe of war and artists felt they had to start from scratch. Of course, that's not exactly how it was, but how it was experienced at that moment. Much of the past was gone. For example, in Belgium, whole cities were wiped out, including Kortrijk, the town where I grew up which was destroyed during WWII. Artists wanted to start all over, from the beginning, but what is the beginning? Constant and the Cobra considered the beginning to be with children and drawing like children. To confront history at that time was very difficult because history looked awful, quite horrendous and I suppose that because they lived it, it was very hard to confront it. However, they were hoping to build up a new future that would do away with all of that, that this would never be possible again, that these wars that had devastated Europe would never ever be repeated.

PON: Do you consider historical work as relevant to current curatorial practice? It seems to me the curatorial debate primarily focuses on the contemporary.

CDZ: Yes, and I've actually discussed this with a lot of friends: it is sad to see that you don't have – and I'm speaking in very general terms without any knowledge of statistics, without any study, but maybe that is something you can do – that only few young people are still studying ancient art history. Everyone wishes to study contemporary art, and it seems so irrelevant to me, because you need to know the past and its visual language. And, like any language, it is inherited from former generations, in fact from the dead, and you have to make it alive again and renew it. We're communicating and working with that language but if we only consider what we know today, it will not function. For the same reason a lot of art produced is redundant because it doesn't take into account art history, and it must be the same in every discipline, for example, in science, where one has to understand what was developed in the past to be able to develop new thinking. Artists like Richard Tuttle and Craigie Horsfield have an immense knowledge of art history, and I can talk to them for hours about the Flemish Primitives, the Constructivists, or abstraction. I had a similar exchange with Giuseppe Penone, one of the Arte Povera artists. Our conversations went back to the Renaissance, to before Renaissance, the Middle Ages, and he would explain to me where and why Arte Povera took root and how his work is related as much to antiquity as to actuality. Giuseppe described to me his vision, described what the transition of Paganism to Christianity meant for art, and all of this is important to understand his own Italian culture, but also his work against a rural background with its ancient myths and legends that he inherited from his ancestors. For example, when he works in the woods around his home, these myths belonging to the past enable him to make art in the present, always wanting to know more and go further. That's why you have such a rich feeling when you look at the art of these artists. Their work is so full of complexity, is made up of so many layers –stratification reminiscent of archaeology.

PON: Do you think that there's a major difference between your generation of curators and yourself, and Catherine David and Ute Meta

Bauer and yourself, and the next generation such will be perhaps Hans Ulrich Obrist, Jens Hoffmann, Maria Lind, do you think there's a difference, not only in terms of the methodology but also in terms of perhaps the attitude towards what a curator perhaps does?

CDZ: Yes, I would think so! [Laughs] I will leave it to you to describe that difference. I'm sure the others said the same thing. Of course, we're all living in our time. We belong to the generation born just after the war, while they identify with a world that appears to move fast, that is seemingly spread across distance and is digital, and it's not so much about quality, it's more about quantity in a world that compares to a rhizome in its spread. And I imagine that we still belong to a generation that tries to look for profundity, for something that is very meaningful. For them the meaning lies in this horizontal plane and I think with us it shifts more from vertical to horizontal. I don't know how else to explain it. However, it is easy simply to stop at this, but remember we live in and to some extent shape the same world.

PON: The vertical-horizontal metaphor makes a lot of sense. Perhaps if you look at someone like Kasper König, who Hans Ulrich trained under or trained with him, and Kasper König worked with a very small group of people to start with, who were very close to him geographically, and I think what Hans Ulrich did, is he just drew the net out and set things in motion. But I do think that, I mean it's something that comes up regularly and something that Liam Gillick pointed out to me last year, was that your generation of curators have kind of taken up the institutional posts within smaller spaces and made an impact in terms of how institutions run, but that has yet to happen with the generation that kind of came out of the nineties.

CDZ: Yes, because they refuse to get into these institutions, and of course in a sense it's much easier to remain outside. But I believe that you have to erode the system from within. Although as you know there is a double thinking here as none of these curators actually work outside of institutions, in one way or another. It is disingenuous to just throw stones at those institutions, or make a show of doing so publicly, while hoping to milk them when they put you up in a nice hotel, invite you to their panels, and fund your projects as a visiting

curator. It's like with language, these systems are there, and you have to try to, if you don't agree with the system, you have to erode them from within, like the Conceptualists, who were very critical of institutions, like Marcel Broodthaers or like Joelle Tuerlinckx now…they don't throw it all away, they don't say 'I have nothing to do with this', they actually have something to do with it, and I am sure an artist like Broodthaers was also very influential on my thinking. But then, of course, I'm Belgian!

PON: Do you think that a curated exhibition can be a work of art or do you think that curating can be a form of artistic practice?

CDZ: Well, I really don't think an exhibition can be a work of art. I've had many artists telling me that I'm an artist, and I appreciate it, they're very kind but I'm not an artist. I may be working like an artist, that's true, in the sense that the process of my creative thinking is developing while I'm working: I don't have a predetermined idea when I start, the project really comes about through dialogue, speaking with the artists, and relation, conceiving of connections and associations. An exhibition and a book come about in the doing, and it's never a thesis that I have upfront, or an illustration of a philosophy I become acquainted with. That's not the way I work. I would research and look at a lot of work from the contemporary scene, from the twentieth century, from the centuries before and then you see certain convergences that haven't been explored or visualised, and you try to convey them. It's almost like digging in the unconscious of the period or of the artist, and what you do is comparable to the work of a psychoanalyst, you uncover the repressed in the unconsciousness of society, you become a catalyst for communicating the eclipsed and marginalised and try to convey a different knowledge to stimulate awareness. In other words, we try to make people aware of something which has been covered up or hidden, and we try to unveil it, because it has so much meaning for the understanding of the actuality of the moment. That seems more, I think, how I work. So when a curator has the ambition to make a work of art, I would disagree with that concept. He or she may go through the same creative process, but then a lot of creative processes are like that, in architecture, in science, even in law, a lot of people think creatively to come to some definition, but I think a work of art functions differently, it upsets in a very subtle

way, makes a shift possible. Works of art together can do that, but I wouldn't say the whole is therefore a work of art. I find the idea that they would all become parts of a bigger artwork that some kind of genius has developed terrible. I don't believe in such a master figure, perhaps because I'm a feminist! But I don't believe in that, in this overarching brain reducing the artworks to pieces of a puzzle. I hope that in the work I've done, every work remains incredibly important on its own, but that the viewer is inspired to make connections among the works which ultimately also enhance the meaning of those works separately. The work of art then comes about in the space between the artist and the viewer, and the curator can perhaps be considered a catalyst in that process…

PON: Do you think that one of the things that has emerged in the last ten years is the biennial system and perhaps more recently the visibility of art fairs as adopting certain kind of strategies, or aspects of biennials, and do you think that we need any more biennials?

CDZ: I'm a very bad biennial goer! First of all, I don't have a travel budget that allows me to go everywhere, and secondly, I wouldn't have the time. I find it personally very hard to see works of art in those circumstances and consider an exhibition project like 'Documenta' as more interesting, because it has received an amount of time to develop into a meaningful project. Five years is really what you need to do a great exhibition, unlike generating every two years a biennial, often decided last minute and curators just have to jump in and make sure there is an event.

PON: Which would seem to suit the kind of curator who would be mobile and on the move and looking more horizontally than vertically?

CDZ: Yes, but then you need viewers who are satisfied with that too. And maybe there are viewers who just like that scattered thing, but there are others who remain less satisfied. We sometimes pick up a few interesting works and select artists whom we had never heard of or seen or had had no access to. In that sense, a biennial remains interesting, but on the whole it belongs in a consumer's world and, as an overall project, I have rarely seen one that is in any way convincing.

PON: You came to curating accidentally, if you like. Do you think that curating is something that can be taught, considering the ever-increasing number of post-graduate training courses?

CDZ: Recently, I've been thinking about this, because a lot of people from my generation and older artists would say that you can't teach curating, and I would tend to agree. It seems hard to teach curating. In a way, there needs to be an apprenticeship. What does it mean? In fact, curating consists of an accumulation of different interpretations that are developed from many sources in different disciplines, let's say, a curatorial approach stems altogether from knowledge of art history, literature, psychology, philosophy, and socio-politics. It's an intersection of many levels from many viewpoints and you need an incredible capacity to relate, to conceptualise, and to visualise all of these to convey them as a new project. In short, visual connections are as important as conceptual ones. The purpose is to stimulate the mind's eye. And it's not about your personal interpretation. Though some of the former models, like Harald Szeemann's, were very much based on personal interpretation, for me that is not enough to convey something to large audiences; a curator needs to be able to really go beyond her personal vision. Obviously, when you create something it's something that comes from your thought, from your experience, but it's a whole different task to make sure it gets conveyed visually and mentally. That was often my problem with former curators like Jan Höet or Rudi Fuchs: their exhibition project was such a gut thing and you just had to get it, and if you didn't get it, you were considered to be unable to understand art. I think my generation was more serious in trying to transmit knowledge, and maybe that's where professionalism started, that we really wanted people to find meaning and understand, to find it not because it was presented as the truth of an authority or arbiter, but to find it within their own experience as a part of a larger conversation. Now there's another move where it's as though you pick what you want to know, you don't have to understand everything, and it's in tune with our society, I mean, our society develops like that too. We are now leaving the idea behind of still trying to understand the big picture, a younger generation let go of that big picture and they're much more into the fragments and the pieces. That's why, of course, Deleuze is so important, because he is describing that process, and he is one of my favourite philosophers, so I understand

that mood, but I think we come out of an education and an experience that were very different.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

ANN DEMEESTER

Amsterdam, 20-09-05

PAUL O'NEILL: So how did you become a curator, or is this a term that you're comfortable with?

ANN DEMEESTER: Well, it still is not, I mean I don't have a problem with it, but it's always a sort of thing, when people ask me, so what do you do? I also have a problem with the term Director, but I'm the Director of this space, so I never know quite how to handle it, because I started out in a very - I studied Literature and Linguistics, although I actually wanted to study Art History, but I was too much of a kind of nice girl, obedient to my Dad, who thought that art history was something for rich kids and future wives of surgeons and lawyers. He never saw me in that kind of position, and literature was my second love, so that's what I studied. When I graduated I wanted to do something with art, with visual arts, but that was kind of, being in my position quite difficult, so I studied another year of Cultural Studies and then I tried to get an internship at a Belgian art magazine, and they wanted to hire me as an editor, which I didn't want. Editor in the sense, I don't know how you say it in English, it's like sort of reviewing all the articles and sub-editing. I didn't want that so I got another internship on a normal newspaper, national newspaper, and I stayed there after finishing my degree, I just wrote mainly about literature and theatre and dance, but I was always preoccupied with visual arts, so I went to see a lot of shows, basically every show that was on, and then my chief editor said 'why don't you just write about visual arts?' and I said 'well I can't, I don't have the background, I didn't study art history', and he was like, but most of our people are sociologists, or whatever, they're not art historians.

PON: So when did you make the transition into curating?

AD: I started writing then about contemporary art for different newspapers, and I actually just - the step into curating was not a very conscious one, because I was very happy with being a critic,

a newspaper critic, that's what I mainly did, I mean, I wrote for a couple of magazines, but all of them, non art magazines. But then I was one day invited by Jan Höet, my former boss, and he called me up, just like that, asking if I would be his assistant, his assistant curator, and I was like, help, no, I mean, I am not a curator, I write about contemporary art, but I've never done any show, and moreover he didn't know me personally, I mean, of course I knew him, but I had never met him in person, and there was a kind of very strange moment, and he said 'yeah, but you know, I read every kind of, I read everything you wrote', which of course was not true because I think I wrote eight hundred articles in two years! And he said 'actually I read more of your theatre pieces than your visual art pieces, but I like the way you look at art', and I thought that was really a ridiculous kind of proposition, but he gave me two weeks to think about it, and then I went to have lunch with him and I thought why not? You know, it might be interesting to step, to make a step towards the other side, and especially with somebody who has so, such a large experience.

PON: This was in SMAK, in Ghent was it?

AD: Yes, so I guess that was the beginning of 2000, and then I worked for a while, both being a critic and working in the museum, but then I was mainly ghost writing for Jan.

PON: And what was you first curatorial project?

AD: It was an in-situ project, can you say that, site-specific project in a small village in Belgium. It was actually an art and poetry project, it's been going on for the past twenty five years, and it's a sort of show that combines poetry and visual arts in sort of, well the village is not abandoned, but it has a lot of abandoned farms and old houses and that was the first project I did, which was a sort, which was more coordinating, actually. Jan chose twenty of the artists and I chose ten, but I did sort of production and the curating on the site, like talking to the

artists, determining the venues, sort of figuring out how they would develop their project, because most of them were new projects, developed site specifically. But the first thing I really did that I felt was really my project, was a year later, in between I curated - I wouldn't really call it curating, I coordinated, or whatever, a couple of shows for the museum and worked on other site-specific projects that Jan was doing. The first thing I did semi-independently was again in the same village, and it was a show called 'An Empty Place to Stay'. The choice of the artists was also very much focused on the venue and on our very personal eclectic tastes. I think that's the first project I would consider that I curated.

PON: This is about 2001?

AD: Yes.

PON: How do you see the role of contemporary art curator, how would you define your practice in relation to that of others?

AD: I think, starting from me, I think I'm really old school, although I'm quite young. I think old school, I don't really know. I was really sort of, in that sense, educated by Jan Höet, and we're very similar, not similar personalities, but we had a very good connection, we had a lot of fights because we don't have the same taste, and not the same way of going about things, but I think what I indirectly took over from him was this idea of really foregrounding the artist. He's known to be a very dominant personality, he also kicks artists out of shows and who can really sort of destroy them, but in the end when he does a show, it's trying to find the best possible way to present the work of individual artists, and I think that's quite, I mean it's quite old school. It's not about a theme or a concept, it's more about a choice for an individual artist or an individual oeuvre, and I'm trying to find the best possible way, even in the context of a group show, to present that work. So it's very much about

construction of meaning, also through spatial relationships, and I always considered that old fashioned and traditional, but that would be my kind of position. The curator much more as a sort of facilitator, like trying to find the best possible context both spatially and content-wise for the work, and then also providing in a way, constructing the, well not constructing a meaning for the public, but that you're both responsible sort of, on a very practical level, spatially, creating the experience for the public, but that you're also responsible in a way for the educational part, that you mediate the work, through the way you present it, through the way you write about it, and I always call it the old school method for me, it's sort of inductive. It departs from all these individual positions of artists, individual works, and you come to a sort of conclusion or maybe common statement if you do a group show, departing from those works, and I think most curators of my generation work in a much more deductive way, they have a sort of statement that want to make, or concept that they came up with, or a theme that they find interesting, and the art sort of pours out of that, or the artists are chosen in relation to that theme or statement.

PON: But having said that he also, when he curated 'Documenta 9', he proposed it as a total work of art and ultimately proposing himself as a meta-artist.

AD: I think that's the difference between Jan and me. He was of this generation really also of Kasper König and Harald Szeemann and who were sort of a lot dependent on their charisma, as a personality, and they saw themselves also in a way as master narrators, specially Szeemann even more I think than Jan. I think that I am not like that, I am more a sort of, not that I put myself extremely in the background, but I do think that the narrative itself comes mainly from the artist, and I'm the one who sort of brings it, or who sort of brings the message in a way. I do realise I have a very short experience, I mean I've been in the business for the past four years very actively, and I do notice

that if you go along, there's more general things that I notice as well, and that I have this feeling that I would like to do maybe a few thematic shows or a few propositions that you do have in mind. I think my learning procedure is really starting from the work and now maybe generally in the future, I would also try the deductive method, but it would still be - I could never be the kind of conceptual curator who comes up with what I would call the Jens Hoffmann type, who comes up with these great gimmick like ideas, you know like - which I'm jealous of sometimes, and the sort of playful proposition or a very unusual kind of approach towards having a show, like the one he did around artists and his personal heroes; 'Artists' Favourites', which was not so unusual, but it's really a proposition that turned things around. Yeah, or like the catalogue, the 'Do It' catalogue by Hans Ulrich Obrist, that's a thing I would never do, although I'm sometimes jealous of it, I think ah shit! But I do think that their idea sort of overshadows the work, and I guess I'm being a bit unclear here.

PON: In the last fifteen to twenty years, there has been an unprecedented interest in contemporary curating. Do you think that the role of the curator has changed significantly during that period, since the late eighties and do you think there are predominant forms of curating that have developed during that time?

AD: I do think that for me, the major shift is, of course I haven't experienced it - in the eighties I was like five, so I mean, it's all sort of hearsay and reading, but what I do think has changed, even since the beginning of the nineties, is that the status of the freelance curator has undergone a real modification. I think, at least from my reading, what transpires is that the freelance curator used to occupy a more marginal, peripheral position of experimenting that was not possible in museums or even in non-profit venues, really sort of being in a way the avant-garde, if you could still have used that term then. I think now freelance curators have much more become star curators, who

dominate big events, who are hired, for biennials, for 'Manifestas', and who, they sort of totally, they went from the bottom of the hierarchy to the absolute top, and so I think that also has an impact on the type of exhibitions that you see, so that probably it is difficult to still experiment with new exhibition models nowadays, but I think it's also become less probable, because of the type of events that freelance curators associate themselves with.

PON: One of the arguments that Lynne Cooke had, in relation to the rise of the biennial structure, is that it ultimately disabled any further possibility, any potentiality for alternative types of large scale exhibitions, like König's 'Westkunst' or 'Skulptur, Münster' for example, which were large scale model shows. Do you think that we need any more international biennials?

AD: I'm very sort of divided about that. I was in Istanbul last week, and I met the people who are currently doing the 'Singapore Biennale', which will be a new Biennale next year, and myself I'm very closely involved with the 'Tirana Biennial' in Albania, which is now going into its third edition, and I see them. I was one of the many co-curators for the previous edition, and now I'm sort of an adviser of Edi Muka, the Director, and I help them with funding and I apply for money and actually logistic advice, structural and financial advice. I have nothing to do with the content of this Biennial, but it sounds like developmental aid, it's more like helping them with how to construct the organisation, how to get money, how to sort of make it more structured. So I don't think for art's sake, those biennials are not really necessary, but they are sometimes, they're a tool for countries like Albania and possibly what I've heard from those. I think that's absolutely true, like, because specifically I think even more for example for Albania than for Turkey, it's really sort of, it's the only possibility that Albanian artists have to have real life contact with international artists, and to have some kind of exchange, and the problem that, for example, Tirana has is that people don't

really go there. They go to Istanbul now, I mean I was amazed by the number of people who came to the opening, it's really like, the position shifted. People feel like it to be an obligation to go to Venice, but they go with pleasure to Istanbul, and in Tirana nobody actually shows up, apart from the curators and the artists, and some friends, but it is a sort of tool to sort of communicate with the Western European art world, and in the end that's sort of the standard and the norm, I mean, and I think that's what I've understood from Eugene Tan from the 'Singapore Biennale', it's exactly the same, it's a sort of way, in fact, to attract attention to the Singapore art scene, and to bring about a certain dialogue, and I think they're only useful in that sense, sort of instruments for, they're not really extra artistic purposes, but they are purposes which have nothing to do directly with showing art, it's more like, they're a tool for a catalyst and specially I think more than for the tourist industry, more for local art scenes who are, you can't use the word periphery anymore, to communicate what's the centre, and I think you have some aberrations at the moment, like what happens in Prague, with *Flash Art*, I hope that will not happen again, because then this kind of - I think the 'Prague Biennale' had the same function as the Tirana one, but if this sort of conflict comes about, and the connection with the local art scene is broken, then this biennial also loses its function.

PON: One of the other things that someone like Jan Höet was significant in was forefronting the idea of the curator as a single-auteur, and he talks about master narratives, do you think that curating is ultimately an individual activity or an authorative activity, as opposed to the kinds of collective collaborative curatorial and multifarious structures that we have seen with 'Utopia Station' or the 'Moscow Biennial'?

AD: I can only answer it from a sort of personal viewpoint, because I do think that, I do think it's a more singular activity, it's really difficult to formulate this. I was recently together

with a friend of mine, who works for Palais Tokyo, a very young curator as well, we were sort of developing a model for an institution, and now we thought, we wanted it to be a bipolar institution, one with a sort of a regular tradition exhibition programme that was curated by just one person, the Director, and we could focus more like on, not really focus on the notion of the artist as genius, the nineteenth century romantic notion of the artist as isolated from the world, as being the instinctive creature, but going more towards that, and then, the second programme would have no fixed format, could be lectures, could be publications, could be anything, and was a sort of permanent workshop, around the notion of collective curating, like how does it work, does it work, how do you go about it. I think that both positions are valid, but I think in the end for myself, I think it's a rather singular activity, that you can maybe do with one or two other people, that you feel very closely affiliated with, both on a level of taste and how you work, and not necessarily on a personal level, because I did one or two shows with people that I'm not very sort of friends with, but we just have the same approach and the same taste. I do think that ultimately it's about combining the objective and the subjective, and if you expand that to more than three people, then I wouldn't know, then I think it can only result in compromise, because you have take all the individual attitudes of the artists and you can't combine it with five individual attitudes of the curators. I don't really know where that would end up, and I think collective curating is probably more interesting if you really want to go and find new models or new formats. I think the traditional exhibition is a sort of one or two or three person thing.

PON: Do you think the group show is still the serious work of the curator?

AD: I personally prefer doing solos, but then you always have the problem, is that curating? Is your personal interaction with an artist where you give feedback and you together determine how

you're going to sort of put the work in the stage, what kind of work, is that curating? I don't know, and then you're more taking on a feedback role. Or you can be very directive, but it's a sort of person to person thing, so I don't know. I do not adhere to this idea of the master narrator. I do think that curating is a form of narrating. When I said before about being a facilitator and a mediator, in the end that's a sort of, it's a kind of storytelling, but it's not as dominant as Jan saw it or as Szeemann saw it, that people have to adhere to the story that you're telling. I think that's much more, the group show gives much more possibilities to do that. We recently curated a show with a young, another young French curator, François Piron, and I felt very ambiguous about the show in the end, because we both have a literary background, which has an influence, and he made a proposition for a show that would depart from a novel. The novel would either more be an illustration for the proposition of the show, and the novel was *The Invention of Morel*, which basically in the end, if you condense the plot to some kind of message, is about sort of the impossibility of communication, because there is a man who goes to an island, he thinks that he discovers people but they turn out to be specters, like projections from a machine that have been recorded before, and is eternally on repeat, and François used that as a kind of metaphor for the interaction between the artists and the spectator. So that basically that there's no, but we both think there's no real interaction possible. It's about one directed experience that you have as a viewer. I mean I really like the aesthetics of the show, it looked very minimal, but at the same time very poetic, but the thing was, what happened, was that there was some kind of levelation almost, it looked as if it was the work of one artist, and I was starting to doubt the validity of doing that, can you, I mean, it was I think, in a sense of harmony and balance between the story you want to tell, and the works speaking for themselves, that was ok, but a sense that, it happened that we sort of unified it in a way, and that was, I think is a rather scary thing.

PON: You mentioned Jan Höet, do you have any past curatorial models or exhibition that were precedents or precursors that have had an impact on your practice as a curator?

AD: As far as the shows that I really admired, I don't know if it had any influence on what I do, is, well, it's definitely 'This is a Show And a Show is Many Things', by Bart de Baere, who I thought was an amazing experience. I mean, I think it's outdated now, if you would do it now, but then this kind of process based exhibitions where works were sort of growing and coming into existence while you were there, and I was living in Ghent, so I went to see it quite often, and it was organically trans-disciplinarian, not in a very forced way, I mean you had Meg Stewart, that I saw there for the first time, and a huge piece by Jason Rhodes, and I thought that for me was the reinvention of the exhibition as happening, but then also sort of, in the end it resulted into palpable products, which I thought was also, for me, a very important thing, that you had both the process aspect and the product aspect, so - but I don't think, I mean, I don't know if it really sort of influenced me in any way, otherwise I should think, but that's the one that immediately sort of springs to mind.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls an art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practice of the past. Do you think that this amnesia has ultimately impacted on our perception of the contemporary art curator?

AD: That's a really interesting question, because I do think that, maybe I should turn it around, I do think like, I didn't study art history, but I know people who study art history, they don't really study exhibitions, or they don't study the history of exhibitions, so I constantly come across things that for me are totally new. Like when Paulina Olowska, she did an exhibition

recently, and she used a number of exhibition formats, I think some references to Bauhaus and De Stijl and for me it was like wow, I've never seen that before. It was something I discovered like two years ago, and it looked like absolutely new to me. This amnesia has an impact on your practice as a curator. I don't know on the perception of it, but it seems to be that we are all not very aware of it, like suddenly there is an Obrist and Charles Esche who have started to quote Jean Leering again and a lot of people here in Holland don't know who Leering is and what he did exactly, why he was so, I think especially important in the level of art education. The same goes for Sandberg and even if you look at what he did now, it's a sort of discovery that you were sort of not aware of, but I do think that the trend to try to be as innovative as possible has slightly disappeared. Even regarding the history of exhibitions less, because there is no longer the sort of pressure of being very new and very innovative. What I thought was interesting about the 'Istanbul Biennial', is that it was fairly traditional, I mean it was just an in-situ exhibition in random spaces. There was no attempt to come up with a very unusual theme or concept, it was just very, very basic, and at the same time it was a very good exhibition and a lot of people were very good. Parts of it were very good and a lot of people appreciated it, so I think that this kind of desire to come with new models has lessened, with new models that would be physical, that would result in sort of physical presentation of art. I think the desire for innovation has moved more towards how can I develop things, which are no longer exhibitions?

PON: There seems to be a trend more recently, particularly with Istanbul and the 'Liverpool Biennial' and also 'Manifesta' in San Sebastian, where biennials or large scale exhibitions are tending to try and look at the location of the city as the starting point for the biennial, as opposed to the other way round, for artworks being brought in, artists are being brought in to make artworks, and even the rhetoric for such exhibitions was about the location of the city. Do you think this could be a de-contextualising

process for the artists, who may not normally work within such conditions and have a relatively superficial grasp of the location and it's history?

AD: I think it has more to do with the general sort of helplessness that, if you get this assignment to do a biennial, what are you going to come up with, and so the most logical and the most easy thing to do is that you connect with the local context, both on a sort of architectural and city planning level, and on a social level. Also great to have a sense, why is that biennial there, and not somewhere else, and I have had a lot of discussion about the fact that I really like the San Sebastian 'Manifesta', but I had no idea why it had to be there. It could have been somewhere else and it would still have been a good exhibition, despite some works that really were focused on the social and political situation in San Sebastian. So I think it's often a sort of general gesture of we don't know how to, how to connect or legitimise what we do, so you have to sort of hook up with the local context, and the funny thing is that if you look at Istanbul, a lot of the social and politically engaged work that is presented there has nothing to do with Istanbul. I think this lack of context may be because of the venues that are chosen. For example, I think that was very sort of strategic move also, and absolutely I approve of it totally, but to say for example that the 'Istanbul Biennial', to move everything to the new city, because you are already making an indirect statement, like, we're connecting up with life now, not with history and not with tourism. This is now and just because you've chosen an abandoned building in a certain area, so I do think it's a tool, a sort of tool of justification for what you do.

PON: Do you think that with the rise of post-graduate training courses in the late eighties, do you think that we need any more post-graduate training courses? Have they had any impact on contemporary curatorial practice?

AD: I wonder whether they have any impact on the sort of content level, because you do, I mean specially I see it more with people coming to de Appel, because it's close by. Also when I was working in Germany and Belgium, it has enabled certain people to get certain positions, but I don't think it has - but I should differentiate between the different sort of CTP trainings, because the critique I always had with de Appel was that it's more like a network tree, it's not very content based. OK, you have some, you have lecturers, interesting people, but it's not very theoretical. It's also not very much based on exercises and practice, because the people only have to do one exhibition as a collective, and mostly they end up with total compromise because they don't really know how to handle it.

PON: How do they work as a collective for one exhibition?

AD: The last group were the only one who really worked as a collective, doing a radio programme, but very often the shows are just like, OK, let's all propose some artists and we will see, and I can accept this, and next let's find a general theme, so I think in that sense it didn't really bring about any kind of innovation on the level of exhibition practice, but more you know, it enabled people to spread, to take up certain positions, to get a name for themselves. But I think for example, Bard College is very different, as it's so grounded in theory that must have had some kind of influence. But it's very hard to judge from a distance, and to, but I think curatorial training practices only have a sense when they are either really sort of continuous practical exercise, make as many exhibitions or proposals as possible, and really in a spatial sense, not - I don't think you have to learn about funding and organising, I think you can learn that by yourself, but more how do you work with space and how do you work with people or it should be very theoretical, but sort of training centres which are in between in which you get to know the current art world, get to know as many people as possible or travel around, I think that it's fun, I can imagine, but I don't really

see the sort of, the added value of it.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making? How do you see your role as a curator and at what level of the artistic production do you see your practice being within the process of art making?

AD: I think we're sort of the ones who cheer at the side line. I think it was Dave Hickey who talked about curators being sort of artistic midwives, and I think that's exactly what it is. You're not actually creating, you're not actually contributing to the creative process, but you're a lubricant and it can be by being very critical of what an artist does, or by supporting it in a practical financial sense, or giving the artist a new perspective on his work through the way you write about it, but I think it's all very much, it's no direct involvement, it's really on the side line. I think it's a bit of a silly metaphor being the lubricant or the midwife, but I think that's exactly how I see it.

PON: Do you see curating as a creative activity?

AD: Yes and no. I think it's creative in a sense of flexibility, because you have to take up so many different positions at the same time. You have to really multi-task continuously. I think in a sense, that's creative. I wouldn't consider it creative in a sense that you actually produce an artistic product. Writing is part of curating in my opinion, I mean I can't imagine a curator who is unable to write a critical text, or is unable to write a catalogue text they would definitely not qualify as being a good curator, although Jan couldn't write at all, but he found other people to write for him. I think that's much more creative if you write. The essay writing part of curating, that's for me a creative act, because you produce added meaning, you produce a sort of surplus meaning. And of course you also produce an added meaning when you set up an exhibition, but I am trying to find

other metaphors for it. It would be more like, if you compare it to writing, it's like, if you write a catalogue text, then you're really the author, you're the sort of novelist or essayist or whatever, if you curate an exhibition, the part without the writing, it's more like being an editor or a sub-editor.

PON: You mentioned people like Jens Hoffmann and Hans Ulrich Obrist, their curatorial practice has been seen as a form of artistic practice. Would you think that that's true?

AD: I don't think it's invalid, but it's something that I personally do not really - do I disapprove of it, is the question. Hoffmann or Obrist as an example, I don't disapprove of their sort of, their way of curating, and I am fascinated by it, but I have a very old fashioned conviction about the notion of the artist. Again, like, it's much more close to sort of the idea to the nineteenth century romantic notion than it is to this idea of the artist as researcher, or the artist as anthropologist, or the artist as cultural producer. It's very much about an individual expression of a certain world view, to generalise it really, and I think in that sense, that does not match with an artist who, or with a curator who also poses as an artist.

PON: Do you think an exhibition, a curated exhibition can be a work of art if it's mediated in such a way.

AD: No, not really, I wouldn't consider it a work of art, I would consider it more like, you create an experience, you don't create a work of art.

PON: In the late sixties or early seventies the curator Seth Siegelaub clarified the changing role of the relationship of artist to curator by using the term 'demystification', how relevant do you think this term is in validating contemporary curatorial practice?

AD: I think, I gather he meant demystification of the artistic/curatorial process or the notion of the artist. I think in a sense it's no longer relevant because the demystification process has happened, so I think in a sense the dominant opinion within the art world is viewing the artist more as a type of cultural producer, which is not taking up a position which is much more exceptional than the curator or the organiser or the critic. So it seems that there has been some kind of levelation, we're all on the same level, the art is no longer up there and we're sort of, stare at him, admiring the creative potential he has. So I think in that sense, I think it would rather be time again for a sort of mystification, especially of the artistic process…

PON: What about the curatorial part of that process?

AD: I think it still perplexes people, they have no insight into it, and I think that what you were saying before, like apparently there is very little literature produced on this notion of curating, and I think there's not so many self-reflectiveness in curating, I mean, there is an amount of myth of curating, but it's a bit underdeveloped, so, I think it's even a mystery for the people who do it. Like how do you, if you had to analyse your own sort of procedure, I think you would come up with surprises.

PON: But on another level the terms of reflexivity relating to curating has become like an overused buzzword over the years to prescribe a false sense of criticality. For example, you have an exhibition like Hoffmann's 'Artists' Favourites', which is ultimately curated or directed by Hoffmann, where he only appears to be self-reflexive, giving over the curatorial reins to the artists, to be selected by him, but ultimately the structure within which they're actually so called guest curating, is actually his structure. It's self-reflexive, but it's self-reflexive by turning them into curators.

AD: Yeah, but I think that's self-reflection on a very superficial

level, because it is, you said what he does, it's basically like also, it's turning the tables around, but twice, so you're back instead at the beginning, but also it's a very superficial comparison, we recently had a sort of a, we celebrated Duchamp's birthday, which was a bit kind of ironical reference to the fact that the knowledge or art history in Holland is really limited, and we wanted to draw attention to the importance of a key figure like Duchamp, but it was also very playful. But one of the discussions that came about was in a way that Duchamp stands for the sort of demystification of the artist and in a way the artist is no longer a genius, but at the same time, because he is exactly the incarnation of the artist as genius, because he became such a key figure that there was a whole sort of personality cult around him, and I think with that so called self-reflexive exhibitions you get the same thing. In a way, what you do is you foreground the curator again. I think the self-reflection should not happen in the form of an exhibition but more in the form of writing, or more psychoanalysis of your own curatorial procedure, because I think it still is a very intuitive thing.

PON: Do you think curating has replaced art criticism as the default career within contemporary art discourse? Has curating as practice replaced writing as theory? Many people who studied art history or cultural studies in the eighties and nineties have become curators, leaving a gap between the curatorial practice and the criticism, and in fact many of the most visible international curators are also now writing for the art magazines, which is representative of the ubiquity of curating within the field in general. We are at a moment when criticism is in pretty dire straits, while curating is visibly everywhere.

AD: Yeah, and that's a difficult one. I think it's partly true. You see, I don't know why they do it, I don't think that curating is so much more glamorous or much more interesting than being a critic, but apparently it's always the lure of actually doing your own show. In a way it's logical and natural, because as a critic

in a way you judge exhibition practice, but you have no idea if you have never done a show yourself, how the process actually works. So you always judge the end product, without really understanding the mechanisms of it. And on the one hand I think that's actually a good thing, because in the end it is about, let's call it the produce, the exhibition that you deliver, that's what people see, that's what they experience. And on the other hand I think it can sort of enhance your understanding if you also know what it is to curate, to bring artists together. So I think it's a sort of trend to be deplored, but at the same time I think it's very logical, and I hope it's going to be reversible and people will go back from curating to being critics, that it will be sort of a circle.

PON: Can you tell me about the curatorial policies of W139 Gallery?

AD: Yeah, there is none! [Laughs]

PON: What makes it different curatorially to elsewhere, not only spaces in Amsterdam, but in Holland, in general?

AD: I think the thing is that W139 started out as an artist-run space, an artist initiative. So the role of the curator was never very much stressed. But the funny thing is that curating was much more rigid in a way, when done by artists than when it's done right now by me, in a sense that the notion of curator was never mentioned. When the previous team, who were both artists, were directing W139, the term curator was never used when they made a show, and at the same time they came up with exhibition concepts which were much more curatorial in a way than what I'm doing now. For example, Jan would, his first exhibition was that he had a sort of house constructed in the middle of a space and he invited artists to interact within the house. His last exhibition was that he built a kind of total labyrinth within the space, and artists should intervene within that labyrinth. So there the

notion of 'artist-curator' was very prominent but it was sort of logical and natural, because they were artists, so although they tried to sort of step out of their own work, in a sense they were always behaving as authors and as co-artists in whatever show they were doing. I think when I came at first, I was totally at a loss how to handle it, because I thought OK, I am no longer working in a museum, I am no longer sort of a direction giving curator, I should give all the space to the artist. I select the artist, and then it' s like OK, you can do whatever you want. But that turned out not to be very productive, because I got totally insecure, because I no longer knew what is my role here, what am I supposed to say and not to say, and it was also very confusing for artists, especially the ones who had known me before, it was like, why don' t you sort of react, why don' t you engage in some sort of critical dialogue, it doesn' t mean like you should accept anything I propose, and I now I think, I don' t know, it' s not a curatorial strategy, but the position of the curator within W139 is sort of very, very much on a sort of, between two extremes. So I try to be anyway as invisible as possible, and at the same time you are very present as a kind of, well first of all in the selection of artists, but also in the kind of dialogue you have with them and how you develop an exhibition together with them, so in that sense it' s really collaborative, it' s not, OK, here' s the space and just come up with an idea and we' ll do it, so it' s very much a procedure of OK, we' ll look at the space together, make propositions and I write a text about it, and review it, and, so I think it' s very hard to define, but it' s trying to, in a way it' s trying to avoid that you' re too much sort of dominant as a personality, that everybody will associate everything with the curator and no longer look at what is actually being shown and at the same time also being present enough as a partner for the artists. Like not somebody who says yes all the time or just accepts or somebody who is actually resisting. I can' t come up with the right metaphors today, and as toward our programme concerns, then, which is maybe linked up with this curatorial strategy, is extremely eclectic, it is not based on any kind of

theoretical premises or - just compare it to Bak in Utrecht, because I feel I get on very well with Mária but we are total opposites, and with Mária Hlavajová there is an overall basic proposition that if I completely generalise it, it's like this belief that artists are in fact imagining the future of what we're going to go through, or that they have this potential to already create alternative possibilities for what might happen, and that is a red-thread through everything she does. It's not the case here, I find it very much totally subjective and it sounds like I can choose by myself, but I choose very different individual positions and in that sense, that's again this doubleness, where you try not to be overly curatorial by defining a framework, like this is our programme, this is what we do, we only show sculpture in pink or whatever, or we only show artists who are busy with sociopolitical problems in Rwanda, but at the same time it's again, maybe it is very kind of person based, because it's really my personal taste and choice. So I think in general the curatorial strategy at W139 is very double, it's very kind of Janus faced, it has two sides to it, that are actually almost opposite but it's prone to change, because I will leave this job next year, so then, and I think the next director might choose a completely different strategy.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

BARNABY DRABBLE

London, 28-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: Tell me how the 'Curating Degree Zero Archive' began.

BARNABY DRABBLE: 'Curating Degree Zero' was the title coined by the German curator Dorothee Richter and myself in 1998 when we organised a symposium under this name. The title references *Writing Degree Zero* from Roland Barthes. At the time we were looking at his famous constellation of 'the death of the author and the birth of the reader', and recognised that the questions around authorship and readership, around production and reception, were very interesting ones within the field of curating at that time. The reason to set up 'Curating Degree Zero', the first symposium, and then produce a publication, was to start a process of relativatising the concentration at that time on institutional curating, and with it the continual repetition of the idea that the curator stood in for an institutional discourse, or was the main carrier or arbiter of that institutional discourse. 'Curating Degree Zero' tried to look at more liminal positions; some figures who had started their life as artists and were developing their artistic practice in a curatorial direction, others who had produced material which involved selection or reclamation of particular historical positions but were presenting it as art production in one form or another, and then also others who were working regularly with institutions but approaching this with a freelance logic, dropping into institutions and attempting to implement quite critical projects, then jumping back out again. These were the positions in which we were interested then, and at the time there was very little written material around specifically about curating, as we both know. Our book was published in '99, was probably the fifth in the English language, and probably including German publications, maybe around sixth or seventh published in Europe. Here I am talking about publications specifically looking at contemporary art curating, rather than curating in terms of museology or ethnology, of which there were more publications.

The archive really came into existence from a discussion I then had with Dorothee in 2002 in which we were looking back to the symposium and interested in the way that conversations and discussions about curating had moved on, but also observing another emergent situation where particular positions within curating were then starting to stand in for independent curating. So the idea of the independent or the

freelance or the freewheeling curator had been invented, but then certain people were becoming paradigms of that kind of practice.

PON: Who were you thinking of specifically?

BD: Well, I certainly think that Hou Hanru and Hans Ulrich Obrist can be seen in this light amongst others, and figures like Matthew Higgs in the UK. They were starting to become mentioned repetitively within the discussions of freelance activity or artist curating. We were aware that despite the fact that the diversity of practice had multiplied since our symposium, oddly a new kind of paradigm had been invented and new stars were being invented around that model. The idea of the archive allowed us then to take in, not only say fifteen positions which one can do in a symposium, or in a publication, but actually to start documenting a much broader field, and also to imagine that might grow over time, that it might start to become a resource, looking at all these different methodologies for approaching curating.

PON: Was Ute Meta Bauer's publication *New Spirit in Curating?* a reference point for the publication?

BD: Not really for our publication, so much as a reference point for an attitude. By this I mean that I think Ute Meta Bauer's publication in 1992 in Stuttgart was pretty seminal at the time. It flagged up the fact that she understood what she was doing in Stuttgart as self-reflexive. She was organising a space and the magazine she published from it was called *Meta*, which in a knowing way referenced herself. The whole idea was titled 'New Spirit in Curating?' - question mark - so it certainly wasn't a sort of promotional exercise for a young generation of funky curators on the career ladder. If anything, it was to try to discuss how curating was becoming recognised as an active agency and whether there was the possibility of self-criticality in that field. I think it was in her introduction, or possibly in her interview with Marius Babius, where she describes her starting point, and here I guess she's referencing Pierre Bourdieu, which is to recognise contemporary art as a unified field rather than an idea of separate fields of production, mediation and reception. This acceptance was necessary to start a particular line of critical

thinking recognising that all of the agents: artists, curators, critics and whatever, were in the process of producing what we might call contemporary art, and therefore it was no longer suitable to have these un-transparent curatorial positions. She celebrated this by organising a symposium looking at all these different kinds of curating which her guests were talking about: delta-curating, minimal curating, I can't remember them all but there were different examples like 'curate the future not the walls', or whatever.

PON: So has the criteria for the selection process in terms of the inclusivity for the archive changed since 2002?

BD: The inclusivity/exclusivity question is one based around two terms which we use, one is 'critical' and the other 'experimental', and we also, to a certain extent, have limited selection along an idea of four particular very loose genres which we call 'freelance curating', 'new media curating', 'artist curating' and 'collaborations that curate'. The wish to de-limit is not necessarily to say that these are the only interesting models around, but more to try and tease out particular kind of work which is going on, and Dorothee and I essentially have a sort of veto on who's included. But the selection process is done through generally quite lengthy discussion and email exchange with partners in each of the venues or in each of the cities where we take and display the archive. Quite often we have other people in those cities who we know and include in that discussion, to suggest who should be included. Dorothee and I then gather information on those proposed and make a final decision on what we feel will add positively to the archive. Increasingly this has to do with what use the archive might be for the public. So if it started to become an archive in which every curator in the world had his or her documentation, its use would evaporate, it would become un-navigable and rather loose and flabby in terms of having any kind of critical meaning.

PON: So what's the priority of its function and how do you see the priority of its function as an archive?

BD: As an archive we'd like to see it as a resource, primarily for artists and for curators so professionals in the art field. Then

also for academics and more broadly for, let's say, an engaged art public who perhaps already have an interest in the terms of exhibition and are interested in the way those things are changing. As with many archives it's quite academic, it's very text heavy, it's multimedia, but it's a challenging experience to visit the archive, at the very least you're probably going to have to leave quite a bit of time. So we're quite specific in saying, we want this to be a 'toolbox' if you like, a sort of series of different methodologies, which somebody might use. Research is the main kind of experience we'd like to suggest the visiting public take on when they're there.

PON: Each time the archive is shown, it takes on a new structure and a new display, for example in Sunderland you employed the artist Tim Brennan and in London you are employing the artist group Artlab. How important is the restructuring and the redesigning of the display for each public representation?

BD: I don't think it's of central importance. The archive could exist simply as a series of boxes with material, and in fact that's really what the archive is, that's what tours, if you like. A series of cases with material in it, and certainly for Dorothee and myself, much of our work is organising, cataloguing, expanding, and editing the material that is in the archive. This is reflected in the website itself, which acts as a kind of index for that material, both in terms of describing the people involved and what their work is, and also in terms of a downloadable bibliography of the materials in archive. But when we decided we would tour the archive, which was a decision that was sort of made for us because of interest in showing the archive, it became apparent that the question of display was one where there was certainly room for play. The first thing we did was to commission some designers to think about this, and address the huge question of what it is to try and activate an audience's interest in an archive. Some people visit knowing exactly what they're looking for and others are not even aware of exactly what the archive is, so we commissioned the designers to make the display as an interpretive tool, a way in, and a navigation system. It came to our minds immediately that there would be people whose practices dealt with that kind of thing in relation to art, like the support structures of Gavin Wade or Tim Brennan's more performative way of working with materials, text and publication. So,

from the point of view of the archive as exhibition, involving people to re-interpret and re-present has become important for us, as the project has toured.

PON: You studied on the Goldsmiths MA Curating Course in 1997/98. What impact did studying on a post-graduate curatorial training programme, for want of a better term, have on your thinking around your own practice?

BD: For me, a quite profound impact, because my background was in literature, and by default, partially through friendships and relationships (my partner is an artist) I moved away from journalism and editing, which I wasn't finding terribly enjoyable, went on the dole and started writing about and writing with several of the artists I knew. I became involved in just organising and putting together events and exhibitions, on a very casual level, and very much just as an organiser or, because I was able to write, a press officer or wherever I could be helpful. When I moved to Germany in 1996 I realised increasingly that curating was something I was interested in doing, and through my discussions particularly with Dorothee Richter in Bremen at the time, I also became quite critical about what was going on. We started looking at some of the exhibitions we saw, and I started to realise that some of these more left-field and underground things I'd been involved in appeared to be much, much more interesting, in terms of the way they were put together and the dynamic between the artists, the organisers and the public. At that point I made a decision that I wanted to professionalise my practice and stop thinking about doing other stuff to make my money, and that's why I went to Goldsmiths at that point, to get a qualification, which would then allow me to apply for positions which would allow me to apply for funding for projects and basically upgrade the economics of the situation I was in, in terms of my practice. Goldsmiths, to a certain extent, formed my practice as a curator, or at least crystallised this as something I wanted to do.

PON: What impact or influence do you think post-graduate training courses have had on contemporary curatorial practice?

BD: I think that's an extremely difficult question to answer, and I

probably have to ask you in return 'which post-graduate courses?' I don't think all post-graduate courses are the same in fact, I know from experience that they're not. The positive impact of the better ones is based on training a particular kind of critical sensibility about the issues of where contemporary art is placed in society at the moment. These issues relate not only to how it's shown but also to how it's validated, how it's given particular power, and how it relates to the political instrumentalisation of culture at present. The better courses are interested in developing a critical awareness in their students, and I would extend this to say good colleges are interested in this not only for people training in the area of curating, but in art making in general. I believe, anyway, that an understanding of the context and the symbolic economy of art seem to me to be paramount to good art and exhibitions at the moment. More worrying is the evidence that curating courses might be seen as part of an expansion of the middle administration associated with art and culture management. I have taught on a lot of these courses and I'm happy to say I haven't really met anybody who I think is heading towards that 'Men in Black' paradigm, as you have written about recently. Despite noticing that some courses are approaching exhibition making in an, at times, un-reflective way, I am always pleasantly surprised by the curiosity of the students. The idea, which I frequently hear said, that curating courses are producing a faceless generation of administrators and bureaucrats doesn't really ring true from my experience.

PON: One of the very early texts that I read and related to those curatorial training courses was by Liam Gillick in *Art Monthly* in 1993. He aspired to a success for post-graduate training courses in the UK following the relative success of Le Magasin in the late eighties, early nineties, but he said he also feared that courses at the Royal College of Art, their main curatorial training programme, would be a playground for failed gallerists and art dealers. Do you think that his prophecy has perhaps rung true?

BD: I think if you look at the relatively young age of the people on the post-graduate courses in London for example, at Goldsmiths and the Royal College of Art, I don't think you see any failed gallerists and art dealers. So I guess that's a no. Generally they are younger curators, artists, critics and what have you. I think they may go on

to become failed art dealers and gallerists, but maybe that's not so much of a problem. I'd supplement that with something else, which Liam Gillick then said later as part of his talk at the Baltic, which was recorded in the series of books edited by Susan Hiller. He was talking about his working with Catherine Stout, when he was doing a project at the Tate, and described her as one of this new generation of post-graduate program curators, and essentially credited her for co-production of the work. He sings her praises because of her negotiation of the project within the Tate, and the fact that she entirely understood what he was trying to do, which was something he believed the majority of the curators at the Tate were unable to do. Gillick, who writes very optimistically about the possibilities of post-graduate courses, has also said at one point that he felt that one of the problems with the fear factor about curating courses is that everybody thinks these students are going to actually become curators. From his experience he ruminates that most of them probably aren't even entertaining this fantasy themselves, and that a training in curating may lead to any number of future practices in the area of cultural production. For me it has to be made clear that Liam's work lends itself to co-production and to a very intense critical relationship with the curator. That in fact is one of the tools he regularly employs to make his work, and to make his work mean, so one might say, he's of a generation and of a kind of work which marries itself very, very well to this kind of high level of involvement which curators might demand coming out of these courses. But, in many ways he is an exception, and I believe that curating students need to be informed of this. Indeed, when I give tutorials to the Goldsmiths students for example, and they start talking about my projects at some point, cross-examining them and taking them apart, I want to stop them for a moment and say 'well, you're a student, you're thinking about all these things all the time and you have time to do that. I'm a practitioner. Who's giving this tutorial, you or me?' By this I mean, they are incredibly critical, all at the same time, every gun blazing, and I have to remind them sometimes that is OK, but when one's trying to get a project working and it's one of several you are involved in, one doesn't always have that luxury.

PON: Liam Gillick also in his Baltic text/lecture, argued that one of the key things that suffered during this period of the curator in the

nineties, if you like, was that the dominance of the replaced role, the role of the art critic being replaced by the role of the curator within contemporary art, and one of the things that he claimed suffered is the level of criticism in relation to the practice: if all the critics become curators, then who's going to write the criticism? Do you think that this is perhaps true?

BD: My practice only really crystallised as such at the end of the 1990s, but I can say, when one looks at criticism today, that it has de-natured quite naturally towards a series of highly subjective positions. As such, a belief in a singular thing called criticism has perhaps fallen away. I think some critics are having trouble finding ways of continuing to practice, particularly because their traditional roles of defining and classifying practice appear to be such a restrictive task at the moment, in the midst of this general free for all, when authorship structures are so transparent and at the same time so complex. So, if traditional modes of criticism are really suffering at the moment, it is probably quite rightly so. My surprise is that we haven't seen a response to that as yet, or at least I haven't read anything which I feel has really attempted to move with that, and perhaps start to fictionalise itself or start to encode some of the ideas of curating and mediation into criticism itself. There is still always an idea of objective distance within critical writing, and I'm waiting in a way for something else to replace this. I mean, maybe some of the worst examples are the best examples as well. Dave Hickey with his *Air Guitar* texts has a certain amount of sort of turbo-subjective polemic; his 'it's all about me' kind of stuff, but I am a theatrical soul and this actually reads as the freshest kind of writing at the moment. Some critics are still attempting to make definitive, authoritative sense of something, and I would argue perhaps that's not entirely the role of the critic anymore.

PON: How would you describe your curatorial practice as distinct from that of others?

BD: I think every curatorial practice is distinct from others, and this is one of the questions which keeps coming up for me in various interviews: 'what is the role of the curator?' And for me it's really a question of which curator? This is what's interesting when you say

'curatorial practice' rather than considering curating as a profession, which suggests the related professional delineation. When one allows oneself to observe curating as practice, I would say these practices are as diverse as those adopted by artists. So yeah, mine's distinct from others, I think one of the things which has interested me really since exactly the point where I took seriously my interest in exhibitions, is that I haven't just been producing exhibitions, I've also been producing events and formats which debate what exhibitions are about. So in a way there's a kind of meta-practice going on inside me at the moment and this has been present since I graduated from Goldsmiths. The possibility of having a front room which is production and a back room which is research running alongside one another, I find very useful. I'm also discovering that a lot of curators who've been practising for a while are looking for exactly such a back room where they are able to reflect more on what their practice is about. Very few of them actually have that at the moment, and I think that's maybe something which initiatives like ICE in Edinburgh (Institute for Curatorship and Education) may be opening up, which is a possibility for people to start to take a proportion of their time to reflect upon what they've been doing and write it down. I have every hope that when that material comes to light, it will be very useful for imagining what the future of curating might be.

PON: Can you tell me about your own curatorial research projects as part of your research in Edinburgh?

BD: At the moment I'm trying to write (and I say trying to, because it's relatively early in the study) about critical exhibition making and address the critical claims of exhibitions in the last ten, fifteen years. There have been many claims to describing the exhibition as an apolitical space for exploring societal critique, admit the failings of party politics, and embrace the need for an arena or a forum for discussion. Equally the word critical is bandied around quite heavily in the discourse surrounding various public funded and independent exhibition spaces. The research will probably focus on a few examples of exhibitions which have made claims to criticality, and then attempt to take them apart, and understand how exhibition itself might formulate that, whether that's in terms of form, content, intention, strategy, or mediation and how much of that

can actively be seen to be true. I am interested that artist-curators and independent curators seem to be the ones who are most prevalent in making these claims.

PON: What are the key developments within curatorial practice in the last ten to fifteen years?

BD: I think we've seen an increase and probably a consolidation of 'artist-curating' as a recognised and validated form of curating, which I don't think was the case previously. There are examples of artists curating exhibitions throughout the whole history of art exhibitions in general, but the idea that exhibition practice can be understood as part of art practice has been consolidated. Unlike early incidences artist-curators no longer need to trade on their difference from other curators, on a mysterious idea of a certain artistic intuition which will produce a beautiful exhibition. Although one might see Tacita Dean's recent project at Camden Arts Centre revisiting a little bit of that romanticism, these days this seems like an exception to the rule. Secondly, possibly since 9/11, we are witnessing a profound re-politicisation of the exhibition format. One need only really look at the titles of exhibitions like Charles Esche's, 'Whatever Happened to Social Democracy?' or 'Governmentality' curated by Roger Buergel, asking the question, 'how do we want to be governed?' to recognise that overt political agendas are being explored through art exhibitions these days. The exhibition 'Minority Report' in Denmark was staged a couple of months before the General Election, addressing issues of immigration and right wing politics. This seems to be to be an interesting example of where exhibition is being used in relation to a political moment.

PON: Do you think 'Documenta 11' has had an impact on that, as well as the politicisation of exhibitions?

BD: I think so. Okwui Enwezor's 'Documenta' was much spoken about in political terms, but unfortunately it was probably the wrong artists who were used to illustrate this. I think Hirschhorn's project has been spoken about repeatedly as if it represents this amazing new approach, which of course is rather strikingly based on a kind of chronic amnesia about socially engaged art practice. It's perhaps

ironic that Hirschhorn himself denies that he considers his work political, and that it has made Hirschhorn into a family name, which was never the intention of socially engaged art practice in the first place. So I think there is a way that the size of 'Documenta 11' probably made it stand in for that kind of exhibition more than it actually being that. For me at least, Enwezor's 'Documenta' was an extremely complex beast which sort of folded and overlapped a lot of issues and I think it was probably the most global or globally conscious exhibition I've ever seen. There was really an attempt to map concerns from around the world and see the points at which they rubbed together. Therefore to describe it as in any way a single issue exhibition would be wrong. But I guess it certainly acts as a backdrop to a lot of the activities which are now going on.

PON: You mentioned the word 'amnesia'. Do you think that the history and evolution of exhibitionary display practice is a repressed history within modern and contemporary art discourse?

BD: Broadly yes, I would agree with you. As somebody who had no art training, but decided at one point to discover what had happened in the history of exhibition making, I was surprised to note how very difficult it was to find things out. You know, I was finding wonderful catalogues from what looked like fantastic exhibitions but them having absolutely no details about why the artists were selected, how their work looked in the space, or even what the space looked like when the exhibition took place. So the whole curatorial aspect was siphoned away and the curator's preface was all about the works with the artist's name sort of bolded out so you can flick to it quickly. It is interesting how many of us are referring to amnesia now which is probably that when one says, 'there's forgetfulness here, we have to remember'. One also then has to think, 'well, what do we have to remember?' and I note that there's a lot of selective remembering going on at the moment. A habit of popping back in history in the tardis to a particular moment where work looks suspiciously like the work you want to make, and then to sort of raise these old heroes on your shoulders and carry them into the twenty-first century and say, 'it's always been going on, you know, this validates my practice'. I think particularly those people who repeatedly return to people like El Lissitzky and Kiesler and Dorner at the moment are probably hopping

over a lot of practice which would be equally an extremely important part of any history of curating, but which has a very different critique on the sort of resuscitation of particular models. One might look at activist group practice in the United States during the 1980s, like Gran Fury and others as an example. So, if we are to respond to an accusation of amnesia, we need to do so with balance, I think, and actually try to build a detailed overview which is inclusive rather than selective.

PON: Is the 'Curating Degree Zero Archive' some way of addressing amnesia in relation to, potential amnesia in relation to current and recent curatorial practice and projects?

BD: Absolutely, I don't doubt it. In the archive, we have a tendency to working with practice, preferring to include documentation of people's ideas and opinions rather than simply of spaces or of projects and this is part of a wish to bear witness to an idea of evolving practice. Some of those in the archive are well known and many of them are not, some of them will continue to work in this field, others will move to other fields. What is clear is that at the moment the field is very diverse and yet increasingly interlinked. There are these little patterns of influence between peoples. Actually, it's less likely the practice will disappear, drop away, or become the victim of amnesia, but more a recognition of this interlinking. This is why the archive is not built as a canon, or as a survey, but really as a kind of family tree if you like, people's relations to one another, influences and meetings which have taken place and led to collaborations, new combinations of practice. So the idea of the tour, the idea of this thing rolling and of it being itinerant also reflects a little bit how these links are made and how place and context play a role in that. If we can use this project to mirror and map these links, we really hope that it will be of use and that it will remind people that this is not the generation of the star curators, nor the Tate Modern generation, that this era doesn't belong to the architects and the big movers and shakers but to lots of little discreet things going on, conditioned by a shared history.

PON: One of the key developments within contemporary art and its distribution is the ever-increasing number of biennials since the late

eighties. Do you think that this intensification of the biennial experience has impacted upon the perception of the role of the curator within exhibition making?

BD: Yeah, it's a difficult question because we're really covering every base in this one. For me the question of biennials and their recent growth in numbers has to be primarily considered as an idea related to city marketing and redevelopment, and with this the, as it's been referred to, 'Disneyfication' of the city as experience. Art with all of its bourgeois connotations and its association with ideas of being able to culture people, finds cities imagining they can use this as a tool and biennials as an expression of this. But these are misguided ideas, to my mind, they tend to be expressed broadly and flatly within biennial culture and they need to be rethought. It does have consequences for curating as there is a growing group of curators who are comfortable to fulfill those requirements and generally they do this by joining the dots, using the market and the institutions as a kind of guide. One need only buy five art magazines, take a highlighter pen, and you've got your next biennial. There are always a few surprises but there is this tendency for it to be very, very homogenous, and that means seeing the same faces appearing around the biennial circuit. It's interesting for me as I met an artist last night for a drink who's just moving into this. She has been invited to take part in two biennials with her work and she is rightly nervous about what that's going to do to her practice. I think artists are aware, and particularly perhaps artists like her, as she is from Israel, that there may be a way that she's being groomed for a particular kind of art, and accepting that she will be presented in a particular kind of way. I was having an argument with Clementine Deliss the other day in which she was crucifying biennials and I was saying that actually the idea of an international biennial, in terms of terminology, isn't really a problem for me. I think an international exhibition, and one which happens every two years, could be a very, very interesting format, and therefore obviously a field of innovation for curators. When one considers it that way, it happens every two years, OK, that's fine with me, it's international, OK, that's fine with me too. Clementine kept saying 'but look at the results!' and of course in so many ways she is right, it is the curators themselves who are instrumental in maintaining this

heavyweight world tour kind of logic. It will be interesting to see in the heat of criticism around this homogeneity, and this globalised nature of the art market and the biennial circuit, whether some people start to come up with some alternative ideas.

PON: One of the more recent shifts within the biennial culture, for want of a better term, has been the increasing profile of art fairs, more so than the number of biennials, in the last two to three years, do you think that this is kind of representative of the relationship between the art market and curatorial practice?

BD: Do you mean the fact that art fairs increasingly are involving things like discussion programmes?

PON: Yeah, they're taking on the format of the biennial, or certain aspects are in the biennial format.

BD: I'd never thought of it like that, but of course you're absolutely right. This is exactly what they're doing. I love art fairs, they scare the hell out of me, as they do any curator who should find endless rows of white cube stuff really quite traumatic. But, the terms of display and the discussion which happens around art fairs, I find really interesting. It really is like a flea market for the art world, everybody's humming and buzzing around these things and talking shop and the idea of adding on some official discourse and linking in to some sort of bus tours out to other things is all quite interesting. But the growth of the art fair is less about biennials and more about the growth of commercial galleries we are witnessing. All major and even minor cities in the UK for example seem to be witnessing and increase in galleries and dealers trying to work with contemporary art, and I say trying to, because I think only a percentage of them are really able to make a living from this. In my relationship to Scotland, for example, I am seeing the sort of nascent gallery scene emerging in Glasgow and Edinburgh, areas which traditionally didn't really have a market and in many ways, like the generation of artists coming out of Glasgow in the early nineteen nineties, and the setting up of places like Transmission were about the lack of market, with the artists agreeing 'that's why we're allowed to make the work we make'. So, in presently every city I

visit there is always, there's new areas, new galleries. One wonders how that growth can continue really, but it is of course driven by a particular kind of hype and hope in the whole idea of the market. Coming back to your question about the curator and the art fair, the connection is of course a ridiculous one. I don't think art fairs are curated in any shape or form, and equally these programs of talks and stuff like that are really window dressing. They're cosmetic. I would say it's an art fair, get in there, shop! I think there are better places and times to have discussions.

PON: The term 'self-reflexivity' is often thrown around, as is the term 'performativity' in relation to and in order to define or prescribe a notion of criticality within a particular curator's practice. Do you think that either of those terms is used too loosely, and how would you describe the use of either of those terms in relation to your own practice?

BD: Yeah, I think both terms are used loosely, but terms tend to be, particularly in relation to art, because they only ever loosely fit. I think what I discussed earlier is related to this. Terms I borrow from Rem Koolhas' ideas for his architecture office, having the front end of the office making stuff and the back end thinking about what they're making; a self-reflexive circuit, if you like. I certainly think that these terms can be used to refer to my practice, and the fact that I'm curating projects, producing works and publishing stuff but at the same time building an archive on the projects of my peers. From this point of view, I think self-reflexivity is desirable, that it's important, and that the value of this is kind of qualifiable in terms of the kind of practice we're seeing. Concerning 'performative', this is a term which when it first came up in relation to curating, several people seemed to be interested in, but nobody ever really wrote anything on it. There was one, very short article published by Katharine Schlieben when she was working with Maria Lind at the Kunstverein in Munich, but it's a very cursory, little sort of dabble in the idea that this might be an interesting term. Other terms like 'new institutionalism' have been more aggressively critiqued and defended recently. So the idea of the 'performative' curator has dropped away and I haven't heard it used a great deal in the past year. I am, however, still interested in it because it denotes an idea

of a curator's embodied position within an exhibition. And this quite clearly relates back to an idea of the invisible curators of the big public institutions; the embodied and present versus the invisible or absent. Through performativity as a critique of absence, we can see a further linkage to the critique of an idealised white cube model, with its intention to isolate the work from all of its contextual parameters, from time, space, mode of selection, with the onus on value and excellence. So the fact that the curator might be present, wearing a T-shirt saying 'I selected this object', is the beginning of a performed position. When one considers the way Maria was working at the Kunstverein in Munich, when she was still running that space, her presence, although maybe not physically, but certainly in terms of her setting up of structures and the fact that that was clearly Maria who was doing that with her team, was a kind of performed or embodied position. I've got an interesting thought on this battle between obscurity and transparency as there has been this tendency really since the mid nineties, stemming from the 'auteur-curators' of the eighties perhaps, to build visible author-curator positions. These positions get to the point where suddenly it's like all lights are on the curator. They're so embodied they are glowing. Whether this is intended and cynical, or actually just the fact that audiences intentionally look for an author and want to find who's behind exhibitions is unclear. But I think it's difficult not to see those two things happening at the same time, a sort of unintentional creation of that position and at the same time people probably not being critical enough about the fact that they find themselves in the spotlight, not being clear enough about the fact that maybe their names shouldn't be lit up like a Christmas tree when the artists are on page six of the same document. So there's a problem when we talk about performative curating, which is an idea that that's the end - curator as artist. I think what's needed, and I was recently talking with Mark Hutchinson about this, is a kind of next stage, a stage which might really be termed performative. I think it exists already, and I think many of the positions in the archive explore this next stage. This entails saying to ourselves: OK, we've broken down particular authorship structures, we are in a position of co-production and if it is probable that the audience are involved in that co-production as well then we need to think about this as a group performance rather than an individually performed insight. This is on

the one hand where revisiting an idea of the terms of collaboration and group work comes back in, which is what Mark's doing. But even more so, on the other hand, we need to move beyond saying yes, it's my decision, and yes, I'm the one people need to talk to, I take responsibility etc. and actually then push it further and say, well, actually yes, it started as my decision, then it was somebody else's decision for a while, and then it sort of dissolved as a decision at all, and now in some way we're just trying to present something, and there's various people involved. That is certainly something which I'd like to see more frequently, a kind of clarity around the group authorship of material.

PON: What dominant representative positions do you think replaced the Harald Szeemannian or authored position within exhibition making?

BD: Mm, very hard question. I mean I guess in a way I've just tried to answer that perhaps with observing the rebirth of curatorial collaborations and today's prevalence of groups that curate. I think also the field of new media curating is very interesting, in terms of a disembodiment, which comes necessarily with the media used. It is of course possible to do exhibitions of new media art, which take a physical as opposed to virtual form. But really, the discourse is so foregrounded within the circuits of the web, the conversation and the production seem to be the same thing, quite frequently, they run alongside and overlap one another. So, what one might say is maybe the online discussion group is a potential idea of a curatorial construct these days. A kind of hub which is informing, producing and framing practice, and people who are involved in each other's practice, practically daily, but working in different parts of the world. I hate to use the word 'network', because as I was told the other day, that's so nineties! So I probably need to come up with another idea, but certainly the peer group that are hugely informative in my work as well is a looser and less opinionated one than its forebears. As a freelance curator today one often pulls on other people's strategies, and then recognises these as a part of the strategy and as a part of the production.

PON: At what moment do you think there was a shift away to the kind of the dominant perception of the curator as carer, within

institutions or museums, towards a more creative component within the production of exhibitions?

BD: To answer this I think one has also to question the evolution of hierarchy within organisations. I would argue that the shift is not so simple as one from carer to creative. An example might be how innovation in the field of exhibition flourished in the 1920's despite the fact that alternatives to hierarchies weren't really thinkable. People still retained their roles, either as designer or artist being commissioned to do something, but any of the outcomes of that kind of work, particularly in the States, seems remarkably fresh when one looks at it again today. One of the things I work with, and maybe this is where we're going back into an embodied or a performed role, is a recognition that curators are carers in their negotiation of a particular social experience. I think that's really what curators do: they negotiate social experiences in one way or another. There are structural sides to that, but there are also organisational questions where one needs to broker a particular period of time, particular space and allowances in order to do the work. That brokering in itself, I think, is key to curatorial work. One can only do that if one evolves these very strict, professional and hierarchical ideas about the product being more important than the process and outcome, so perhaps the creative component is to move away from hiding a great deal of the work which leads up to exhibition, and revealing that exhibition is made up of all these different stages. I would add that in relation to this, the biggest influence for me has been working with Hinrich Sachs, who necessarily in his artwork started to question these things, really early on.

PON: Are there key exhibitions or historical moments or precursors that have been an impact on your own thinking about your practice as a curator?

BD: Yeah, many, but I think it's probably not good to list them. I'll have to come back to you on that one.

PON: In order to be self-reflexive and self-critical about your involvement in the 'Curating Degree Zero Archive' curatorial project, what self-criticisms would you have towards yourself in relation to

that project?

BD: Hopeless naivety I think is the first one, and lack of foresight I think probably as well. Those two are linked, which is to say I don't think that when we came to build the archive we understood how it was going to travel, the extent to which it was going to travel, and the questions which that was going to raise in terms of what our position was on the promotion of this structure. If we were to build that archive in our flat, nobody would raise a critique of that, but to be placing that archive in places and suggesting that it means something is problematic. I mean archives are basically ways of validating and historicising particular things and I don't think we were critical enough with ourselves about what the fall out in trying to validate a group of our peers' present practice might really be. We were much more excited about the idea of rolling this structure around and what might come of that, where it might take us and people who used it, what might pop up. So the critiques for us are based on that lack of foresight which now is reaching a kind of critical point for this project after three years. This archive is getting larger, is costing more to transport every time we take it somewhere, the archive itself is naturally eroding, books are losing covers, DVDs have stopped working, and it's already starting to decay. Equally it's soaking up more and more of our time, and obviously there are lots of other things we'd like to be doing and are doing. So all of these kinds of things come back to a naivety of not really realising when you give birth to something that it is going to tour for eternity. So the critiques we encountered, for example, in Bristol that this was a promotional tool for a young generation of funky curators I needed to meet really head on, because it's certainly not what we perceived the archive to be. But in that discussion I could see that they'd picked out several people who they believed were exactly in that mould, and the idea that we were presenting documentation of their work in an art space, which from their point of view should be used to show artists' work, was kind of interesting.

PON: One of the questions that you've outlined in the 'Curating Degree Zero' discussion planned for the Serpentine Gallery for May 26th, is that if we have 'artist-curators', why can't we have 'curator-artists'? Do you not think that we already have 'curator-artists' and

perhaps the position of the artist-curator stems from this need or necessity on behalf of artists to gather back the curatorial reins? I mean I'm talking about the shift between curator as meta-artist towards artist as meta-curator in relation to various practices from Superflex to Apolonija Sustersic and many others, where the practice embodies both the curatorial methodology and a form of artistic production?

BD: I think what you proposed there was a kind of war, and I guess that's why for me the question remains slightly tongue in cheek about artist-curators and curator-artists. That question was the title of my MA thesis when I was at Goldsmiths, which I wrote in 1998, and as somebody coming from outside the art world engaging in the debates between curators and artists, I was aware of this continued pretence that the artist was primary within the art world, that it all comes from art, and of course the artist is the one who gathers all of those strings and for me at that time it was absolutely apparent that wasn't the case. In every structure I saw I recognised, if anything, that the artist was like the lowest in the food chain. All of the meaning was being made elsewhere, people were being picked up and hyped at that time, during the yBa/ post yBa era, and one couldn't fail to recognise just how entirely fabricated their success and their importance was. For me this reflected back on a lot of artistic practice, where rather than believe the hype one had to gradually re-read the work and rediscover what one thought of it in the first place. So for me, the question about the artist-curator or curator-artist was very much actually about the myth of primacy, and still remains one, an idea of the ghost of a modernist project, which appears to be revived and revived and revived. I see this war over primacy as laughable when one considers that both curators and artists are producing in a time when culture itself is being instrumentalised by a far larger enemy, which is the challenge to critical art denoted by the growth of the creative industries, and neo-liberal understandings of culture as industry itself. So, for me, I was just thinking like, the longer we keep breathing life into this idea that everything stems from the battle between the artist and curator, the more danger we find ourselves in terms of being able to reply effectively to the changes which are going on in our society and culture. That's where the question came from. I think certainly we have 'curator-artists' and the archive is

full of them, and it is practically very difficult to see the difference between their practices and those of their artist curator counterparts. I don't see a war in which the artists strike back by attempting to play the curator. I think practices are organic in both areas, and often strayed unwittingly into each others' territory, but often with brilliant results. So my feeling as an outsider coming to this without art history, not as an art practitioner, is that this kind of cautiousness is actually more a kind of bitterness based on relatively tiny differences in economy and power, than really a critical debate. I work with an understanding that deregulation is taking place, and a critical recognition of what that could lead to, in the positive sense, is more desirable than an endless cycle of diving back into the old days where these things were supposedly separate and where one was at least nominally more important than the other.

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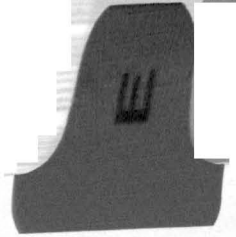
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OKWUI ENWEZOR

Bristol, 04-02-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator? Is this a term you are comfortable with?

OKWUI ENWEZOR: I have tried many times to describe my trajectory into curating and I always come down to the fact that what I say is that it was a 'happy accident'. I didn't set out to be a curator. It was never my ambition to become one. While I was very interested in the critical context of art, I never thought that curating would be a professional role that I would come to play in that context. I was interested in the ideas that art could elicit amongst very diverse groups of people, of different cultural, political, social and economic backgrounds and orientation. And here art became something for me that was really profoundly connected to the sharing of ideas in this sense. On this very minimal level, I was interested in contemporary art. However, I came to New York in 1982 from Nigeria and I came with a very limited historical understanding of how the art world in general functioned. However, what was very striking for me in New York was becoming a participant on the periphery of New York's artistic milieu almost like a wallflower. My education happened in museums and numerous galleries, every week, where, at first, I knew no one, understood little of what was happening, but nonetheless was encouraged and driven by sheer curiousity and an interest to decode this mystery that kept so many kinds of artistic production from the conversation that was happening. I was fascinated by the almost morbid sexiness that attached to the figure of the artist of the 1980s, the operatic bombast of the gestures, and grand scale of the work. While all this was terribly exciting, in a curious way, I never approached the art world from the perspective of being a fan or a groupie. I never sought out artists. Maybe, I had a sense of misguided aristocratic detachment.

I think this is a very long explanation. But what really triggered my interest in was the absence of artists, whom I thought in my naïve understanding of the art world as liberal and an accommodating sphere, should have been there. But they were not there. Because, I grew up in Nigeria, I never absorbed the cultural lesson that only white Europeans could do certain things, that as an African I already had a place designated for me in the pecking order. Without knowing it at the time, the nature of my interest as a curator happened because I could never accept a pecking order in which there was no possibility of being on top of the ladder. So I became engaged and started to probe the reasons why.

It was really more like a vocation for me. My training is in political science and literature not in art history. But the more I thought about that, the more I began to really think of how the mechanisms of exclusion function in suppressing artistic views that are not so easily encapsulated within the Western canon. I began to explore how to challenge those exclusions through meaningful intellectual engagement. I started writing and before too long curating became a possibility, as a medium for specific types of intellectual engagement. This was really my interest and of course this is how I entered the field.

PON: So you curated your first project in New York?

OE: Yes in the late eighties in a tiny cafe in the Lower East Side.

PON: How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has developed since the eighties when you started?

OE: I wouldn't really say that what I was doing in the eighties was curating in the intellectual sense that I use for what I do today. These were my days of crude apprenticeship. I organised exhibitions not curating. I organised and curated poetry readings (before the slams drove me out of poetry completely). About the evolution of the contemporary art curator from the eighties, the way I see it, is like night and day. The eighties and before was the colonial, Jim Crow, and apartheid days put together. It was completely acceptable to the curators of the period that contemporary art did not happen in places like Africa, Asia, South America or the Middle East. While much credit is given to 'Magiciens de la Terre' for breaking this hegemony, and I would concede its importance, the work of people like Rasheed Araeen, Gavin Jangtes are equally important. Put simply, globalisation transformed the myopia that previously ruled the judgments of curators. When curators of my generation, began, against the better judgments of the gatekeepers, to show interest in a wide variety of artistic approaches and biennials began taking place in so-called peripheral cities the type of narcissism that previously dominated the art world had to come to an end. The insurgent discourse of post-colonial debate is another moment, and this remains vital for me in keeping sharp the distinctions amongst all of us working as curators today. The post-colonial is always my point of departure.

Obviously curators have to work out their ideas based on their interests. I like the fact that you are making a book about the history of curating because it is a way to ground it historically. And I would hope that you would consider the impact of post-colonialism. I have often used a very simple notion: for me, my role as a curator is as somebody who is intellectually interested in art and the meanings that it produces and how one can organise that within the limited context of the institutional space or the gallery space or the public space within which art is presented. Having said that it may sound pretentious, but it is an intellectual practice. I do think that the responsibility of the curator insofar as working with art and ideas that are made elsewhere, is an interpretive one, as well as performative. It is important to find curatorial devices to activate work that by virtue of its critical difference is resistant to easy translation. It is, I hope, not only about responsibility to the forms or ideas of the work but also responsiveness to the very historical conditions under which art of the present is being produced. For me making an exhibition is a way to engender new ways of looking at the deep entanglements between art, society and its institutions and the ways in which all of the residues of the encounter between the public, artists, art, and institutions are registered in the context of historical narration. I think that a curator has to be alert to all these formidable edifices that impede our ability to be open to other types of work.

I want to go back to what for me is really instructive about the generation making exhibitions in the nineties: the fact that suddenly there was a larger awareness of the broader world and there was a greater degree of discourse and dialogue between people working in different contexts and locations, not only in cities but across continents. This trans-national context, for me, is fascinating and I think it is something quite productive. I say this because the previous generation of curators didn't really do this, they didn't really work in this way. Their area of focus was much more circumscribed by old models of modernity. Their work was much more related to the kind of social networks that the curators belonged to and of course the milieu of the artistic industry clustered in a limited art market in Western Europe and North America. It was much more localised. When it was understood to be international it really was bilateral engagement between Europe and North America and there were economic and political reasons for that, for this lack of meeting points.

The curator of this moment who is working with a broader awareness that art is made in all sorts of conditions and that the conditions of production also is as much interesting as a way to read the work, as a way to present the work, as the very context in which the work is being presented. We have very varied and diverse places of practice, people contributing to artistic discourse across a wide sphere of experience. There are obviously the informal and formal economies of contemporary art and I think it is really the role of the contemporary curator to constantly find a way to bridge these relationships. One other thing I want to add is the degree to which the contemporary curator really began to undo the power of the critic in this sense. That is really a story that still needs to be told in a way. We cannot possibly say clearly why it happened, but it did happen, but it appears to me that it came about as a reaction to the power of the critic as the arbiter of meaning. Think of Clement Greenberg and to a lesser extent the criticism that currently emanate from *October*. While in the past, it was difficult to ignore these authorities; today the insurgency of the curator of contemporary art has shifted the scope of the critic's power. I think that may partly owe to the fact that the contemporary curator was much more attentive to all the theoretical issues that came out of post-structuralism, post-modernism. As much as we want to deny that, all this has helped shape the very work of the contemporary curator and I believe that my work is part of this trajectory.

PON: Amongst this multiplicity and the multifarious models of curatorial practice, do you think there are dominant forms of curating, which have emerged since the late eighties?

OE: Well I mean, I think, you know one thing I could say for certain is the group and thematic exhibition is a dominant form. Though it may sometimes appear like a bazaar, it is a much more efficient way of taking the temperature of what is going on. And it remains to be seen what the impact of technology and the internet as a different distribution system would have on curating. So far, it appears quite limited, partly because the process of dissociation that happens with media, with that of experience and engagement that happens in a gallery or museum have not been hospitable to so-called web-based art and exhibition platforms. We have gone through different stages but it seems to me that the group exhibition model is very interesting because in a sense it works contra to

the canonical model of the monographic presentation. It shows to a greater extent the vital and productive messiness of the contemporary, the inherent disarray within its forms, the indiscipline of the contemporary artist to adhere to a single rule. To bring a greater mix of people into an exhibition is as much a way of looking at the ruptures as they exist within the field of artistic practice - to set the emergence of new positions and to understand the shifts in the tectonic plates that is the ground of culture. It is interesting to ask ourselves why the thematic group show has taken on such interesting possibilities, but within that we can begin to break it down. I would like to say that the work done by say alternative spaces in the seventies and the early eighties is really very important and formative for what came in the late eighties and early nineties, because they provided the possibility for addressing these other art economies, and the disarray I mentioned earlier. This includes having institutions, museums, galleries, criticism, media and the academy acknowledging such disparate interests as feminism, multiculturalism, identity, queerness, otherness, exoticism, etc., as genuine areas of art, not simply archipelagos that are allowed to drift away because they carry fugitive ideas that have incredible fragility, that cannot really survive otherwise in very traditional institutional contexts. I think the group exhibition has been the model for defining these multifarious ways of engagement. The one that has been very much critiqued is the geopolitical or the geographic group show, or context related art, like the young British artist, the national model, which seems to be very problematic, very limited in terms of its perspective. I don't always agree that the national model in itself is a failure. It could be a bit tendentious.

PON: The exhibition 'Magiciens de la Terre', 1989 regardless of its flaws, was the place in which 'contemporary African Art' made its first appearance in Europe. How significant an influence was this event upon later more integrated global exhibitions such as your own 'Documenta XI' in 2002?

OE: Throughout my career, 'Magiciens de la Terre' has been the one exhibition that I have to contend with, to push off my back, but it has nothing to do with what I do or the way I think about the trans-national sphere that I mentioned. However, I think that 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' made a pragmatic impact in terms of the relations of exchange. If we were to see the exhibition space as a contact zone of culture, sort of the way

James Clifford talks about it, picking up on Mary Louise Pratt's more ethnographic reading of the contact zone, then Jean-Hubert Martin's project did indeed frame the problematic of trans-national space of exhibition practice. I will say that 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' in a way opened up a space for really articulating the relationship between the works made in the West and non-West. However, the problem of 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' was that it was still very predicated on a very redundant view of who should be an artist in this 'other' space. Many people say he [curator Jean Hubert Martin] had an ethnographic eye. I don't think this was the problem with the show. It had a new colonialist eye and this for me manifested unwittingly for the curator a kind of curatorial bad faith in a sense, because what he couldn't deal with was an academicism that really was the dominant artistic paradigm in places like Africa and other places. It was ashamed of this academicism and therefore suppressed it. But it was not ashamed of it in the West, but it was ashamed of it in other places because the curator haughtily translated those academic art practices as really poor imitations. This is where the ethnographic authority comes in, in the search for authentic pasts, in the valorisation of extreme otherness as way to generate a contrast between the primitive and modern. This for me represented the failure of 'Les Magiciens de la Terre'. So whatever way Jean Hubert Martin would put it, I think it was really intellectually very problematic in this sense. I would say that this is where the curatorial bad faith comes from. However, I must contradict myself by saying that I do in many ways have the highest regard for the boldness of Jean Hubert-Martin's statement. I am very grateful to him for making that attempt, because it gave us a tool, a possibility to argue vigorously about what is at stake in the shifting context of artistic production between the post-colony and the metropolis. So how do we reconcile the historical disentanglement of all these relationships, works of art that are not made to be viewed in a gallery context, but when presented they produce a new form of spectacle that could be quite clearly an engagement with art and so on? So here the curator becomes a different kind of actor, and this was a very interesting idea posited by Jean Hubert-Martin. As far as 'Documenta XI' is concerned, I don't think 'Documenta XI' and 'Magiciens de la Terre' share anything at all in terms of methodology, in terms of curatorial interests, in terms of intellectual interests, in terms of historical questions, beyond the fact that we were really interested in the widest possible notion of where art is made and I think that is the case. I make no secret of the fact that I

was very interested in the post-colonial dimension of 'Documenta 11', and I mean the most expansive way that one could understand it. The post-colonial is not simply the elsewhere, over there, and over here means something else, but to see the entire global entanglement as post-colonial in its shape.

PON: One of the key questions you asked in preparation for 'The Short Century: Independence and Liberation Movements in Africa 1945-1994', at Museum Villa Stuck in Munich, 2001 was 'How do you put together an exhibition about a continent?' Is this a question that remains unanswered?

OE: It completely remains unanswered and I can say that I am very glad that we principally failed to address the entire continent. Even though there were seeds planted in the exhibition that made it possible to say ok, there is a trajectory that one can actually look at and say well: 'it does make sense', but without completely totalising. I didn't set out to totalise in 'The Short Century…' and I am very happy that even if I had tried that it was principally a very good failure.

PON: I know that show later went to New York, but was there any particular cultural or political reason why it started in Munich?

OE: There was no cultural or political reason, it was just simply the desires and the interests of an institution that I knew, who heard that I was preparing this project which I was originally preparing for Johannesburg and then said I would like to host this exhibition. I said well, I think it is quite an expensive exhibition and Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker (who is a shrewd and bold thinker about apart and culture) said she could find the money and I said why not? It was just really personal interest on behalf of Jo-Anne Birnie Danzker, who was the Director previously of the art gallery of British Columbia in Vancouver. She is an Australian who has a very wide and diverse interest in the history of the modern period in all parts of the world. I was very happy to have met her.

PON: Would you say that 'The Short Century…' was in part, a kind of research, preparation for 'Documenta XI'?

OE: No it wasn't because it preceded my appointment as Director of 'Documenta XI'. Jo-Anne and I had already agreed to do this show before

the appointment, but I must say that if it wasn't a preparation for that, it did make very clear what my larger historical and intellectual interests were, vis á vis art I wanted to show in 'Documenta XI'. I must say that I was fortunate that it was very complimentary in a way, even though I was focusing very much on Africa, even though it was not only African artists who were shown, we had people like Jean Rouch, French and American artists so it was not only just African artists, but I think that it prepared a ground for us to deal with the larger questions we wanted to pose with 'Documenta XI', but it was not a research preparation for it.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents, or precursors have been an influence on your thinking about your practice?

OE: I must say that I am really a kind of autodidact in the sense of learning how to be a curator, I still don't think it is possible to teach people how to curate and so on. I really got into curating not looking into past examples, but obviously now there are examples that I admire incredibly and you can say that they are the usual suspects. I think of Pontius Hulten's practice for me is enormously satisfying, the bold initiatives he has taken. I like the fact that both Hulten's work as curator and a museum director and the interplay between these two positions, those two relationships and so on. It seems to me that he is first a thinker of artistic forms and their meaning and the practice of artists, and how to make that legible within an historical context, more so than before he is a 'Museum Director'. Ulli Beier, a German-émigré who worked in Nigeria during the 1950s and 1960s is enormously important. I obviously admire Harald Szeemann's 'Documenta V'. I think that exhibition remains foundational and unsurpassed in terms of its ambition, energy, and adventurousness. I also admire people like Walter Hopps. I really admire Marcia Tucker who after the debacle at the Whitney in the late seventies went on and founded the New Museum in New York and the incomparable Susanne Ghez at the Renaissance Society in Chicago. I am a great admirer of some of my contemporaries like Catherine David. I really admire the work of Group Material and Marcel Broodthaers. I think that their work is as much an artistic practice as a curatorial practice and I think that in the history of exhibitions, their work in the history of curatorial practice, their work has to register somehow. Not only because of its discursive nature, but the kind of exhibitionary meaning of the work is very important and so on. Of my own generation, Hans Ulrich Obrist

is enormously gifted.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past, do you think this amnesia has affected the way we perceive contemporary curatorial practice?

OE: She is absolutely right on the side of art historians but not on the side of curators. One of the things that we fail to acknowledge is that the views that we have of artistic practice have largely come through exhibitions, more specifically modern art and art historians tend to deny that. They tend to deny how the curatorial energy of past exhibitions has really shaped the ways in which different movements emerged and were received. Whether it is the Fauvists or the Cubists and so on, those designations emerged out of exhibitions. She is absolutely correct. One other person I wanted to mention is the legacy of somebody like Kynaston McShine, in a much more institutional framework but nonetheless very formidable in the sense of his anticipating what is to come, whether it is through the exhibitions 'Primary Structures', the 'Information' show in 1970 at MOMA and the Duchamp exhibition. Kynaston McShine needs to be really known a bit better in the curatorial world than he has been known. I think that 'Information', for me, remains unparalleled in terms of the effects that exhibition has had in different curatorial practices. People may not actually know that exhibition, but somehow it has sort of seeped into many of our sensibilities and the kind of mixed economy of the exhibition space. The old Dada exhibitions are just as interesting to me and so on.

PON: How did being involved as a curator of such international exhibitions such as 'Documenta XI', the 2nd J'ohannesburg Biennale' or the 'Venice Biennale', alter the way in which you thought about your own view on the role of the contemporary art curator?

OE: Well, I don't know whether it has altered my view. One always has to look at these works in retrospect of course, but in the immediate period of making those exhibitions you leave not only drained and exhausted but also apprehensive, because obviously when you make large projects it is open season on the curator. What I will say is that it has made me aware

of the fact that I am a great promoter of biennials. I'm not the least sceptical about them. There is a fashion of scepticism about biennials. I am not sceptical simply because I have seen many of them, in so many different cultural and geographic contexts and very few are of the scale of say Johannesburg, 'Documenta' or Venice. Most of them seem to be quite improvisatory, and most of them seem to be quite modest in what they intend to achieve. I am interested in how these biennials have really infused a new sense of the contemporary in cultures that did not or do not have the institutional legacy to carry it forward. The kind of alternatives that they provide for the ideas of modernisation, modernity and the ways it opens up some institutional space for artists working on the local level. I think, for me, the principal lesson I have learnt is that biennials have really exploded the myth of the lack of practice in very different parts of the world. It has sort of forced curators to look more carefully. The careers of people like William Kentridge or Anri Sala come to mind. Their work in the international circuit would not have been possible without these biennials and they have really produced occasions to allow us to reflect on the very limits and the very limitations of the contemporary artistic sphere. I am quite resistant to the certain forms of critique of biennials, more specifically because they are critiqued based on the fact that they are everywhere, that peripheral localities have acquired a taste for them. It is no longer small privileged places like Venice. Everyone does it, so it is not interesting anymore. I say, the more the merrier. No one says there are too many museums and there are.

PON: One of the common criticisms is that there is an insufficient amount of time given to the process through which the biennials are realised and that it is often a small group of curators who are given the responsibility. Would you not agree?

OE: That is true. That is less the problem of biennials, but a problem of the organisers, who try to instrumentalise the biennials for their own civic power. Because what you see in what you are mentioning doesn't seem any different to what you see with contemporary art museums all over the world, they are all the same. They all have the same Richter's, they all have Richard Long 'spattered wall', they all have the same Carl Andre on the floor. I was just at the Tate the other day, and I thought my goodness, how terribly boring, how unimaginative, and how very mediocre in fact. It is like going to a catalogue and just simply buying your own

version of modern and contemporary art. It hardly deviates. At least in biennials there are mistakes that are visible and there is some energy. They are not always the same. Obviously there is a tendency to repeat the same artists, but they don't always repeat. I tend to think that we should focus our attentions more on closing down museums of contemporary art than biennials. Museums of contemporary art do absolutely the same things. I don't want to use the notion of risk, because risk is not what museums are necessarily about but I think that it has to have some kind of imaginative vitality to strike out in a different course and introduce ideas that are least expected from the institution.

PON: As Artistic Director of 'Documenta XI', you selected Carlos Basualdo, Ute Meta Bauer, Susanne Ghez, Sarat Maharaj, Mark Nash and Octavio Zaya to work with you on the overall curatorial endeavor, was this a way of getting away from the more 'single-auteured' position associated with such large international exhibitions?

OE: It was in a way. Obviously, it is very difficult to avoid the position of being the auteur when you are being the Artistic Director. You can bring in as many people as you want to sit at the table and you still have this big question mark. But I wanted to emphatically make it clear in the context of 'Documenta XI' that there was no single author but a group of collaborators very much in tune with each other's strengths and weaknesses. This was by far one of the most transformative, energising, and challenging group of people to work with. What is the degree of the contribution by the group? It was really, for me, with my colleagues, to address the context within which we were working and to enter into a dialogue that we could make visible to a broader public what was going on globally in contemporary art. And I deliberately chose people who were not all completely curators by profession. I wanted to have a mixture of intelligences, if you will, within the group and I couldn't have been blessed with a better group of people. They are smart, they are engaging, they are critical, and they are really very tough people. It is not people whom you can overwhelm with a singular, ungiving argument. I will say that I gained enormously from working with them, but yes I wanted to get away from 'Documenta' being this thing of one singular voice. I wanted to have a kind of 'think tank' to elaborate some of the questions of 'Documenta'. I think it served the project immensely well. In 'Johannesburg Biennale' I attempted the same mechanism but a little bit differently. I invited a

number of curators to respond to my project, but they were completely free to make their own exhibitions. When people look at Venice in 2003, we did this already in Johannesburg. In 1997, it was Hou Hanru, Yu Yeon Kim, Geraldo Mosquera, Colin Richards, Octavio Zaya, Kellie Jones, and Mahen Bonetti curating the film section. I think Johannesburg was far more experimental in this sense. Number one, we say it was 'Johannesburg Biennale', but it was not the 'Johannesburg Biennale' alone. It took place simultaneously in two cities: Cape Town and Johannesburg, amongst different institutions in these two cities. This was a way to look for possible contradictions in my own methodology. Kellie Jones for example thought that she wanted to make an exhibition of only women artists, which I completely abhorred, but I couldn't stop her from doing it. It's her prerogative, she did it, and it was a good exhibition. Colin Richards wanted to work only with South African artists. I said oh my goodness that was precisely what I didn't want you to do. He said he wanted to do it and he did it and it really was very significant in a way. Hou Hanru wanted to use the end of the British colonialism in Hong Kong as a metaphor for the end of history. It really was very provocative and the wonderful thing was that we only had fourteen months to do the exhibition. Working with one's colleagues is really a way of opening up the process to new forms of accountability, to new ways of viewing the curatorial process, to multiple perspectives.

PON: Was 'Documenta XI', as Ute Meta Bauer has suggested, a means of reconfiguring the art historical canon?

OE: It was in a number of ways, but it was also about where the canon was going to be read from. This has been one of Ute's preoccupations in her own work as well. This is one of the reasons why I chose her without even knowing that she was a candidate and one of the last two finalists with me for the directorship of 'Documenta XI'. I had no idea she was. This was completely opportune and I thought it's great that we are doing this together. So already, for us the question was: how do we read the map of contemporary art from Kassel? And that meant that Kassel had to be connected to these vectors. That is how the 'Platforms' emerged. Of course, this was the original idea that I had, that I presented to the nominating committee in 1998 in Berlin. We wanted to look at the notion of the canon. We wanted to look at different ways of working. We were very interested in documentary. It came out clearly and we were least

interested in the short film genre or the mindless, numbing looped video. We wanted to use the medium length, or epic length like Jef Gey's 36 hour film or Ulrike Ottinger's 7 hours, or other artists whose films were 4 hours and so on.

PON: So playing with the impossibility of total viewership?

OE: Precisely. We wanted to confound that. We wanted to say that it is not possible to simple absorb everything as yet another fast food meal. We wanted to make it clear, that if the public were to insist on absorbing everything then the period of digestion must by necessity take much longer to digest the material. I think we run around these exhibitions thinking that you grasp it all, but that was precisely the point and it became not only a project of endurance. That wasn't the point. It was about impossibility of total consumption.

PON: Since the late 1980s it is through the predominantly 'a-historical' and temporary art exhibition that the significance of an artwork has been determined by its assigned place amongst other works. Many of these exhibitions are very different in concept and selection of works and artists, but what they have in common is the fact that they abandon the traditional chronological arrangement. Exhibitions such as Harald Szeemann's 'A-Historische Klanken' at the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum in Rotterdam in 1988, and Jean-Hubert Martin's 1989 'Les Magiciens de la Terre' at Centre George Pompidou, Paris, juxtaposed works from different times and cultures alongside each other. Such post-modern arrangements came under much critical assault for what curator Patrick Murphy, called 'stay at home cultural tourism' - presenting art from other places as if other places are all the same, where artistic artifacts are paraded through the exhibition, the range of origins providing the meaning, a kind of polyglot regionalism. Since the late eighties we have had an increase in the number of biennials, do you think that Murphy's claim is still evident today?

OE: I don't think it is evident at all. I think there is a kind of striking provincialism in his statement, even though I can understand the perspective from which he is speaking. You can't know the content of artistic production just by mere display, there is a greater commitment one has to have, art historically and otherwise to be able to pull it off.

I think he is correct on that level, but I think at the same time there is a kind of romanticism that people have that there will always be a misunderstanding when you take on the work of other cultures. Those do happen, but those misunderstandings can never be addressed unless you make an attempt and this is what is really productive about 'Les Magiciens de la Terre'. It provoked very important critical, historical as well as philosophical debate that has remained with us. That is why more than fifteen years after it happened it is still fascinating for us. It is still a touchstone, for or against ways of working. Maybe because biennials have become so commonplace, we tend to ignore that these juxtapositions can produce visual incoherence. This visual incoherence in itself can be part of this excitement. The fact that you have to wade your way through this thicket of forms and meanings and ideas, and issues and subjects and so on, in order to emerge on the other side of some kind of intelligible distillation of what it is all about is not in itself unrewarding, even if its ultimately challenging. Many curators are using this as a method. If you look at 'Cities on the Move' by Hans Ulrich Obrist and Hou Hanru, that is precisely the kind of maelstrom of things and so on, really the cacophony of the exhibition itself that becomes the meta-artwork in the exhibition if you will. It has had some positive consequences for how one makes exhibitions.

PON: Is it not a very Western modernist notion of 'otherness'? When things are decontextualised from the social, economic and cultural conditions within which the work has been made, it does not necessarily quantify it as being unreadable?

OE: Absolutely. This is really the problem. Native cultures must stay native in order to be properly understood and therefore they are more authentic. This is really part of the problem. I think that the chrysalis of this argument in and of itself do not quite do the job, other models will have to emerge.

PON: What current curatorial projects or initiatives do you think are breaking new ground? You have already mentioned Hans Ulrich Obrist?

OE: I really thought that 'Laboratorium', which Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden organised in Antwerp was really engaging, but I must say that right now I am very attracted to places like DIA Beacon for the

clarity and the partiality of that. There is a kind of precision to that institution, as frustrating as its deliberate exclusions might be that is really very interesting for me. I am interested in such contexts as well, and things like the Freud Museum, London. I think we really have to find different forms and ways of playing with making exhibitions. I must say I love the Field Museum in Chicago because they are really very funny as museums of material culture, sort of like a time capsule. But short of that I admired what Francesco Bonami tried to do in Venice. I thought it was courageous on his part, in this setting to try to unravel the relationship between the director and the curator. It was interesting. I must put in a word for the work of Iniva in London. I think that is a great model, through this kind of agency format Gilane Tawadros has been able to do some very productive and important historical stuff. The exhibitions they have organised in different institutions since they were founded and also their publications have been incredibly important. I really don't know of any comparable institution of contemporary art, really doing this kind of work being produced by Iniva. I like the fact that Iniva has really been able to do these sorts of projects and really remained on significantly stable ground as they negotiate the process of institutional discourse, artistic discourse. I think it is a very good model. I am really surprised it is not taken as seriously as it should be. It really is a significant institution. I like the agency model.

PON: In an interview with Carol Becker for *Art Journal* in 2002, you said that you wanted to 'make distinctions between curating within the canon and curating within culture'. What are these distinctions and how were they explored in 'Documenta XI' and your other projects?

OE: I have always tried to work outside of the canon and to do it within culture. This is not to say that the canon is bad but the canon already has a highly circumscribed notion of what artistic practice could be. I think this is already embedded within a very large historical determination that is in many ways very much set. It is un-giving. I am really interested in curating within culture, even when I am drawing from the canon in order to unsettle the kind of methodological issues that have become so situated in one place. To curate within culture is to take a space of culture in the present as an open place of working and that means that you have a greater mobility in terms of bringing in procedures of making art that may not yet have a place into the broader context of

contemporary art. I suppose this is the realm within which most curators work, except when their ambitions change and they want to make an exhibition of Andy Warhol. I mean what could be more generic. When their ambitions change, when they want to become more institutionalised, they want to prove their commitment to the canon. This is what usually happens, it is more strategic. You can see immediately the intellectual poverty of some of those gestures and I completely understand what you see when the move happens. The curators have already reached a threshold when they want to have a permanent job.

PON: Is this also what you mean when you say that you are 'looking historically at the present'?

OE: Precisely. It doesn't mean giving up the canon, but I think to find a way to re-jig the canon and to make work that obviously, in the broader cultural context, can have the possibility of opening up a different kind of dialogue.

PON: Do you think post-graduate curating courses and institutionally-led curatorial training programmes have impacted upon the increasing professionalisation of curatorial practice? Do you think the curator has kind of replaced the critic?

OE: Obviously, this is really a consequence of the proliferation of museums, blockbuster exhibitions and biennials, but also the proliferation of other forms of mega exhibitions. Exhibitions have become legitimate mediums for art as the novel has been for fiction. Someone has to look after these things and the connections they help us make in negotiating the relationship between art and society, institutions and the public. Just like you have tons of writing programmes for aspiring playwrights and novelists, the curatorial training programmes are going to grow to meet the demands of exhibition making systems, all of which derive from the total absorption of life into various formats of display. We live in an exhibitionary context at the moment. We are each in different ways always embedded in a potential exhibition, from the mall to the high street. We either want to be seen or to look. So here it makes perfect sense that curatorial training programmes can be developed according to this logic of increasing diffusion of life into display. My doubt however is whether it is possible to train people in such a one-dimensional way, in which

curating is only what they learn how to do. What is very significant in terms of the curator supplanting the role of the critic is that a lot of works of criticism today, of course is for a generalised public and are almost like press releases in service of either the economic interest of the commercial art world or the ideological purposes of the public museum. The writings of curators however, are understood mostly by a specialised public who happen to read exhibition catalogues. That is because attempts by institutions to foreground their own memory has really led to the uses of skills of curators as honest tools of propaganda. At most curators operating under these conditions become reduced to mere cheerleaders of artists. I don't know the way out of this dilemma.

PON: In response to Tony Bennett's idea of the 'exhibitionary complex', where the world is seen as an exhibition, but do you think that the exhibition itself has almost become the 'whole world'?

OE: It has not quite reached that level. I think Bennett was quite canny in his reading, even though some of the Foucaultian imposition in the text struck me to be a bit incorrect and over-determined. I think he is largely correct in other ways.

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is? How would you describe a 'good' curated art exhibition?

OE: I wouldn't even begin to touch that. I think it is possible with any form of criticism, but I can't quite tell you what good or bad curating is. I just don't know. I really have to think about it. It is a provocative question. To do so one has to really do a comparative analysis of curating and it is only within a comparative context that one can begin to sort that out. I mean there are exhibitions, which are deliberately bad, whatever that means, but that is part of their statement so how can that be bad. Exhibitions have been like laboratories of incredible investigations and I would really like to take away these absolute judgments like good and bad as a value, as a way of describing what people are trying to do, whether they hang it low, whether they put it on the floor, whether they take it off the wall. It's like good or bad art, we can make those judgments but I tend to reserve them for my own personal experience than something that has any kind of intellectual efficacy.

PON: What are you working on at the moment?

OE: I am in the process of finishing two books at the moment. One is called *The Post-Colonial Constellation: Contemporary Art and the Global Stage* and the second is a book which is more of a study of the relationship between photography and the archive in African Modernity. It is called *The Archaeological Present: The Post-Colonial Archive, Photography and Modernity in Africa*. What this really is, is a very traditional history oriented book; looking at the convergence of a number of different factors in the interpretation of historical imagery by artists, photographers and filmmakers, so it is not only related to photography alone. Currently, I am leading a team conceiving a new museum in Aachen, Germany, of which my complete task is to write up the concept of the museum. I have to finish it by March 31st. It is called Bauhaus Europa, but it is not a museum of art but a museum of history and it is sort of predicated on looking at the origins of the modern idea of the European Union. In terms of exhibitions, I am working on an exhibition called 'On Governmentality' which will open in Sweden next year and another project at ICP, ' The Rise and Fall of Apartheid', so there are quite a number of things I am working on simultaneously.

END OF TAPE

ANNIE FLETCHER

Amsterdam, 20-09-05

PAUL O'NEILL: So how did you become a curator or is that a term that you're comfortable with?

ANNIE FLETCHER: Yeah it is. I used to have the angst that lots of people had about it and I realised it was completely nonsensical to worry about the term. I became a curator because I started to work at the Douglas Hyde Gallery in Dublin, a Kunsthalle space, and I found it just the most interesting thing I could imagine actually in terms of how to think. It just seemed to be a really interesting intellectual language, so I - actually the minute I started to work there I knew I couldn't do anything else.

PON: You later studied in De Appel in the curatorial training course. What were your reasons for that and what were your expectations?

AF: My expectations were probably very naïve. I was about 24 and I'd done about a year and a half working in the Douglas Hyde, and it was the main sort of art space in Ireland at that time. I mean, it may be equitable with De Appel in terms of institutional status, and the Museum of Modern Art had only been established in 91, so there was very, not a huge amount of platforms, I suppose, for contemporary international art in Dublin or Ireland at that moment, and I just read the advertisement in *Flash Art* and knew I was kind of grappling with organising shows, but this was the first time it had sort of been presented to me as a kind of profession that you could develop more specifically and it seemed really exciting, so I went into it literally thinking I want to know more about what this is.

PON: And De Appel was set up in 94 which was after the RCA course which opened in 93, which was after the Magasin in 87, which all seem to kind of look to the Whitney Independent Study programme to a certain extent for structural influences. Do you think that post-graduate training courses have had an impact or influence on the recent developments of curatorial discourse?

AF: Definitely, and good and bad. There's an awful lot more curators out there so there's an awful lot of different ways of curating, and the language has got just critically much more

sophisticated, I think, because it's just multiplied because suddenly people are beginning to sort of think about the differences in approaches. I was a complete advocate of getting one going in Dublin, which just started a few years ago, because I always think the more curating done the better. It's basically quite a pragmatic activity on some levels, and I think it's just incredibly important to have a working dialogue with other work as much as possible, and I have no problem with multiplying that activity as much as possible. I think the way that one can sort of think about it then, is through good criticism, and that's actually what we're lacking. So we're multiplying curators but we're not actually really thinking about why and what we're doing what we're doing. So that's the only problem, but I think in terms of getting, producing knowledge through work, I think great, lots more please!

PON: How would you define your own curatorial practice as distinct from that of others?

AF: I don't know that I would define it as distinct than that of others. I would define it as quite different than what I was learning in De Appel for sure, which at that moment had been very much about establishing a network, in a way. Very much about being professionalised and talent scouting, to a certain extent, and when I left that course I felt remarkably worried about how I would articulate that in terms of what voice I would have, and the one thing I learnt on the course was that you would never show that you're worried. There was a kind of certitude about the attitude that you were supposed to have as an auteur, and what became remarkably clear to me was, I had no idea what that voice was, as far as I was concerned, and that the voices that were offered as examples to me were incredibly problematic, because they were dogmatic and they basically followed the fashion game, and I was never any good at fashion, so I didn't know how to find a place in that. But what was more remarkable was that I wasn't allowed to say that and then I did an MA in Critical Theory in Goldsmiths and that was just an eye opener for me. All that idea of worry was given a name, which was 'criticality', and I realised how actually there was a whole activity, which was asking questions about why we're doing what we're doing, and I wouldn't - to return to your earlier question about

whether I would call myself a curator, I would, but I'm fascinated constantly by what the hell a curator is. So I would say that half of my activity would be asking what it is and how, how can we make the structures of what we do more appropriate to the practices we're experiencing, and therefore I really want to be as flexible as possible in that. So, and yet it sounds like such a cliché, therefore, to be kind of critically reflexive as a practice, but in effect, the practical strategy that I found to do that is to remain freelance, to try and jump into different situations, contexts, and audiences, so that I can constantly ask that question of myself, and react actually, and for me that kind of sharpens that possibility, and the other way I would define my practice, I suppose, would be - and that's becoming even clearer to me now, that I'm very interested in thinking about curating as a kind of enabling structure and as a kind of knowledge production structure or a space for a discourse, but alongside that, I'm extremely interested - I'm worried about that too, because I'm worried about the fact that discourse might be replacing artistic activity, and while I think that it's incredibly important to have things in dialogue with each other, I'm also extremely interested in the specifics of practice and the fact that artistic language is beyond other kinds of language, or it has its own language, and I'm very interested in trying to find structures appropriate to follow that.

PON: Your curatorial practice seems to me to have shifted away from working with kind of art works or autonomous artworks, say. I'm thinking about the exhibition 'Sex' which was here at De Appel, and also 'The Way Things Turn Out' at the Irish Museum of Modern Art, which could be said to be a move away from more conventional group shows, although they're very, very different in their structural remit. Your practice operates through collaborating with artists and working with the discursive aspect to certain artistic practices. Was this move a conscious decision or is that just reflective of developments of recent contemporary art?

AF: I think it's that, but it's also the absolute - I think curating is a very pragmatic business, and I think in both of those situations, were situations where I was invited at a particular stage and I responded in the way that I thought was appropriate to both of

them, as in I had the brief to kind of think about - but yeah, perhaps not so imaginatively in terms of 'How Things Turn Out'. But on another level, when I did 'How Things Turn Out', I just had this really acute sense in, which I would say is still with me, of what, what was appropriate there and then at that time, and it was to give a classical acknowledgment to particular practices, maybe, or to bring them into the canon in a very particular way, and I'm a real advocate of using orthodox practices or established practices or conventional practices when I think they're appropriate, and I always think about that in relation to somebody like Gerard Byrne, like the exhibition suits his practice, whereas an artist like Sarah Pierce, for example there's a whole other remit of things that are appropriate there, and so I'm trying very hard not to - I definitely think it's true to a certain extent. I've moved in a way to - but I'm hoping that I'm always trying to think about strategies that are a) appropriate, and b) enabling - interesting, and challenging to the remit of curating itself.

PON: You used the term 'critically reflexive' earlier. The keyword that Seth Siegelaub used in the late sixties in order to define the expanding and changing role of the relationship between artist and curator was 'demystification'. Do you think that demystification is still a loaded term within current curatorial practice?

AF: That's a really interesting question, because I just heard Vito Acconci talking at Cork Caucus and he really argued very hard for 'demystification'. I think it seems to be an inherent part of the practice now, and I was talking to you the other day about this idea of methodology at the moment, to supply information to think about opening out, almost educational, I was hoping in a very sophisticated way, but we were talking about 'Manifesto', and I was thinking about how part of that remit was to supply information to open, to demystify, to try and to show, be transparent, somehow, but maybe you could tell me what you mean by loaded?

PON: Siegelaub used the term 'demystification' much like it was used in media studies at the time and Marshall McLuhan's idea of the hidden message and the idea of the message is the medium so what I mean by 'loaded' is a clarification of what we mean by making visible

the relationship between the structure of the exhibitionary project or artist's project, and making visible the role of the curator as a part of the production of meaning around art and its dissemination at a time when the figure of the curator is experiencing a level of visibility alongside the artist, as opposed to being the historically hidden figure.

AF: In principle I would agree with those strategies, but on another level, maybe the visibility of the curator, on another level, is something that should be questioned in terms of how super-visible they are and, rather, say that they should be made responsible, accountable, and clearly able to take that on board.

PON: You've been practising for between ten to fifteen years now as a curator during which time there's been kind of an unprecedented interest in contemporary curatorial practice during that period. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during that time and do you think that there are dominant forms of curating that have emerged?

AF: I just think that there are more forms, so that's what's changed. I think that it just was, I mean, I'm sure you've heard this so many millions of times, of course, the sort of very overtly sort of auteurial role of a curator seemed to be something that was very present in the early nineties to me, anyway, in my experience. I just think that the approaches have multiplied, actually. One of the things that seems to be so apparent now is a kind of engagement and maybe it's something to do with demystification, but on another level, there's a very clear trajectory of curating that seems to be about engaging and explaining the world and revealing or demystifying the political and power strategies, I think that's really obvious. There's still a very clear talent scouting fashionability, but the rhetoric of politics seems to me to be the dominant form of accounting and curating at the moment. But there are very few people who are actually engaging with it, in a way that excites me, I think. For me, one of the moments of ultimate, absolute frustration was the 'Manifesta' in Frankfurt, where I felt this earnestness was just dripping from everything, and there was this sense of just revealing the structures that are there, somehow and that was when I felt that

notion of critical distance or revealing just evacuated itself of any meaning, it just becomes a kind of mannerism.

PON: One of the things that emerged in the eighties, certainly in the eighties and early nineties, particularly with large scale exhibitions, and particularly biennial type exhibitions, was the kind of representability or the visibility of a singular author behind those exhibitions and the last five years one could see a relative transformation where most large scale exhibitions were either multi-curated or they were kind of collaboratively curated. So from 'Johannesburg Biennale' where Okwui Enwezor invited a number of people to work with, he did the same in 'Documenta 11', and then Bonami invited a number of people to co-curate, well curate different sections of the 'Venice Biennale', and even this year's 'Istanbul Biennial' is curated by two curators. Do you think that that, that kind of collectivity or that idea of a multifarious approach to such large scale, so called global exhibitions, is a critique of that kind of singular auteured position, or do you think that, and do you think that has worked in some way?

AF: It is for sure a critique of that. I think it's a classic strategy of trying to suggest that there are more voices than one, and that the author is dead! I think it's worked but again, I'm amazed at the speed at which certain methodologies are just taken as a kind of given, and I remember when Okwui did that in Johannesburg, I didn't see it but I remember it was like, just amazing to think about the idea that he'd gathered a group together, and before that when you were talking about this very clear position of the one curatorial voice, articulating group shows and sort of expansive idea, it just seemed amazing to give - the argument then had been the curator versus the artist, and who had the authorial voice? Was it the artist or the curator, and then suddenly it was about breaking down the authorial voice of the curator in, and acknowledging they may not have all possibility. I see that it's very positive, and interesting, on lots of levels, but I'm just waiting to see it become again the next main strategy, so, but it's why I'm so interested in this idea right now about returning to the idea that the artworks and the practices are producing the knowledge, rather than the multifarious, now are many curators, that ultimately we have to be

responding to the practice. Even that idea of actually, I'm even beginning to find that a little bit less interesting, the idea of a collaborative authorship. Ultimately I just think it's interesting to follow the practices and see where it's appropriate. So any of these overarching umbrellas or movements can be really exciting, but they have a shelf life.

PON: One of the critiques of these collective curatorial structures is that the actual structure and the meetings and the kind of space of discourse is ultimately interesting to those involved, but how it manifests itself in the space of exhibition, in the space of public representation, isn't necessarily as apparent to the so called public as it is to those who are actually sitting around the table over a period of a year to two years, having very, very interesting conversations, and I'm wondering whether on another level, whether Bonami's 'Venice Biennale' 2003 and Okwui's 'Documenta 11' are kind of the final statement in relation to that collective?

AF: Perhaps they are, what seemed obvious about Bonami and interesting in a way, was how transparent it was. You walked into the room and you could say that was the Catherine David room and that's the, that's the Carlos Basualdo room and they were very interesting for that, it was extremely clear that you could see that this was a particular trajectory that each of the curators was following, and there was a consistency of argument that it was absolutely about them as auteurs still, even if there was lots of them! And while it was more complex perhaps, and less visible, and maybe more mystical in terms of 'Documenta', and maybe the Bonami is maybe a repost to that idea that that conversation when it's collective is more interesting behind the scenes, because it's not visually apparent. What maybe was really interesting about Bonami was he put it out there in such an obvious way. I don't think it's over in terms of the possibility of collaborating and the possibility of responding and talking and sharing ideas. I think again, it just depends on what it's for and why it's producing something.

PON: One of the interesting things that's come out of that is that next Documenta 12 will be curated by a single author, Roger Buergel, and the next 'Venice Biennale' is being directed by Robert Storr, is

this a return to the single author again.

AF: I think that there might be a movement at the moment that when they were looking for Buergel I think, and this is just what I heard in terms of gossip, but I think it's kind of interesting and prescient kind of moment, is that they wanted somebody German, and I think that's actually what's happening now, and maybe the kind of collaborative, if you look what happened in Istanbul, one of the key things that was important about the collaboration between Vasif Kortun and Charles Esche was that Vasif was there, and while definitely the art world or the structures of the curatorial world is beginning to understand that there may be more sophisticated possibilities than just landing in somewhere and commenting on something. A gesture for example at the moment has been from 'Manifesta' to allow the curators to suggest partners themselves rather than just banging three strangers together. I think the next thing is about thinking in really consequent ways about the local specifics and however we as mediators, because fundamentally that's what we are, can be sensitive to the local kind of context and audience.

PON: Do you think the group show is still the serious work of the curator?

AF: Only where appropriate. I can develop that more if you want. Amazing things can be articulated through a group show, but I totally love doing a solo show as well. Choosing different possibilities excites me, so now I don't think it's *the* work of the curator. I think there's a really interesting curator friend of mine called Frederique Berholtz and she has ran a space in Maastricht and I asked her 'you don't make many group shows', and she said 'I love artists', and it made me laugh but I thought it's incredible, and working with the intensity at which she's following practice, particular practices, and I think that's again, I keep saying there's lots of ways of curating but I really respect it. I think it's really fascinating. It has been the dominant form and it's very interesting, but I would definitely think it's not the only way to do it.

PON: What past curatorial models, historical precedents or

precursors would you say have had an impact on your practice?

AF: It's very recent history so it shows my age, I suppose. I suppose the first thing that blew my mind was seeing 'Traffic' in Bordeaux, which was done in '95, and I suppose those kinds of issues are still being discussed. But actually the model hasn't changed so much since but it was more the subject of the show that seemed very interesting to me. Maybe things like Gordon Matta Clark's 'Food Store' or maybe it's just called 'Store'. That for me was really interesting, that kind of suggestion that art can be very embedded in real life. But I mean, I don't know much about, I have to say, about the long term history.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Ann Staniszewski highlights what she calls a historical amnesia towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think that this amnesia has ultimately impacted on how we perceive contemporary art curating?

AF: Yeah, I think I'm guilty as charged, basically, and I think it's a really interesting point to think about, I'm actually, have gone through a curatorial training programme and am now heading up one that's completely embedded in the present, and as far as it goes, it's probably only through artists' works from the sixties and seventies, but it's completely embedded in the present.

PON: Do you think that curating is an artistic practice?

AF: I think it's a creative and I think it's a really intellectual practice. It can be…

PON: Do you think a curated exhibition can be a work of art?

AF: Yeah, sure, but I'm thinking more about artists who use curatorial strategies I suppose, but I would like to define myself constantly as a mediator. I like to think that responsibility. I suppose what I'm thinking about clearly is that, how many artists have employed kind of certain curatorial strategies in their work? But I would like to be really particular about the discipline for

itself, so I think maybe, while artists have adopted it in particular ways, and while I do think it's both a creative and kind of intellectual exercise, it's really important to retain the idea that artistic practice is specific and particular and we're there to mediate that.

PON: Artists can be curators, artists can be critics, critics can be curators, but curators somehow cannot be artists. So why is there an interest in retaining a modernist notion of the artist's each individual practice as having some kind of untouchability beyond the realms of actually producing something that is art on behalf of a curator.

AF: I'm just thinking about the idea that it's more about skill in a way, it's impossibility if I'm thinking about it personally, but at the same time it can be like doing a performance for me, at Cork Caucus I did a public performance for the first time that projected me into a kind of a sort of ambiguous artistic space, which I really enjoyed and had never experienced it before. The possibility is there, to mess these things around. I suppose the reason I'm a little bit resistant is not that I want to protect spaces as autonomous but I'm just so aware at the moment of the erasure of artistic space. It's like what I was talking about earlier, so, but you're right, perhaps I'm wrong, perhaps it's a kind of a very artificial construct.

PON: If we think of people like Fareed Armaly, Superflex, Apolonija Sustersic, Bik van der Pol; most of those people work collaboratively to a certain extent, but the actual physical manifestation of the project is often not very much. In the same way as much, many curators work kind of discursively, and I'm thinking of projects like 'Institutional Squared' by Jens Hoffmann or I'm thinking of the 'Sixth Caribbean Biennale', Hoffmann did with Maurizio Cattelan and I'm also thinking of 'Do It' by Hans Ulrich Obrist, as a post conceptual artwork, there are many different curatorial projects which are in a state of 'becoming' art, even if they may not be mediated as art.

AF: I think you're right. I think that's a really good point.

PON: The term 'performative curating' was used by Maria Lind as a testing site in the Kunstverein in Munich. This term described what they call a kind of self-reflective curatorial practice associated with certain kinds of contemporary art projects where the curatorial strategy is made more apparent. Do you think that performativity is a useful term for a critical form of curating?

AF: I think it's a useful form for living! I mean, I'm sorry but I do!

PON: Should we, or can we evaluate what good or bad curating is and how would you describe a good curated art exhibition or project?

AF: Yes, of course we should evaluate it, it should be a big part of what we do, actually, but the question is, who and how do we conduct all these conversations, we're all embedded in it, but I wish there was more, I wish there was more space for rigorous critical writing, and I wish that all the same people didn't do all of those things. I wish it was a privileged space in the same way as perhaps artworks or curating is, and the second part of the question?

PON: How would you describe a good curated art exhibition or project? What are the outcomes that are necessary in order to define it?

AF: It really depends. Again, I suppose a certain amount of responsibility, a certain amount of responsibility of the curator, a certain amount of, just putting things together in a way that I may have never seen before, and if it's a group exhibition or a certain way of seeing things where I'm excited or it's a way of formulating an idea that I hadn't thought of, I suppose. But on the other hand, I think a really good curatorial strategy would be to sort of excellently engage with a particular artist's practice in terms of a solo show, or so. So sometimes I'm looking for intellectual stimulation. Sometimes I'm looking for incredible precision. So, responsibility is the criteria in a way to practise, and finding again appropriate measures for appropriate things.

PON: You've worked predominantly as a freelance, so called freelance curator. Do you think that there is a difference, a significant difference in the discourse surrounding institutional curatorial practice and that of the semi-autonomous freelance independent curator?

AF: I think one of the most really basic things about it, I think, I like the fact that you've used the word semi-autonomous because I've had so many battles with people about the idea of being independent or freelance or how one would articulate it, because of course you're completely reacting and embedded in other situations and have to take the consequences of those kind of engagements for sure, as somebody who's, to use your term, semi-autonomous. But I think one of the really obvious things to me that I'm kind of amazed is never part of the conversation about heading up or running an institution as a curator, is the sheer pragmatic work that's involved, that isn't for somebody like me - everything from maintaining the mailing list to worrying about the building to engaging in the civic politics to thinking about a consistent and constant audience in a one size at one time. They're simply different skills, or often they are more skills and that management responsibility is something that I would say that I don't have.

PON: One of the interesting things that has emerged in the 1990s is the idea of the curator as a creative component within the mediation and production of contemporary art is that the job description of an institutional curator has been emptied out of all the kind of administrative internal structural of activities that curators carry out on a daily basis, and it's been emptied out of all those practical things, aspects to curation, which ultimately enabling this notion of the curator as somebody who actually is creatively engaged in the production of art exhibitions, catalogues, etcetera. The job description and the actual common perception are now two very, very distinct and different things now, they have been separated out in cultural terms.

AF: I totally agree with that. It's exactly why I'm trying to sort of continue to practise what I do, the way I do. I've been accused of being flaky; not wanting to grow up, it's amazing the pressure you're

under to constantly take a job, an institutional job. Actually, even in Istanbul it's amazing, two people had very serious conversations with me about when are you going to get a job? And it's extraordinary, and I think it's really, really problematic and really dangerous, because it does consume a massive amount of your energy all of this stuff, and to promise, to set up the promise of engagement that you're setting up through exactly that, that the sort of unfair or wrong representation of what a person within an institution is doing, is both unfair on the curator, they're all insanely busy and I don't know how half of them survive, and it becomes a quite macho culture as well, of the not sleeping and you know, kind of endless travelling, and I find it all extremely tedious and really problematic that that's hidden, and I'm sure many of these people are extraordinary, that's clear, and that they manage to balance all those things is clear, but something has to give, I'm convinced of it, and then one needs to find the strategy that's best for oneself to deal with that, and there are other things of course, there are other problematics to constantly jumping, being really reactionary, feeling that I'm always reacting on a level, and not necessarily thinking in any long term way. But that's changing now in situations where I'm actually projecting maybe a year or two ahead. The other thing about being freelance that's really problematic is never being around long enough to really respond to the audience on certain levels, or develop that kind of relationship. But I think that's such a crucial question and it drives me mad, it's really - Charles Esche actually put it once and I really liked it, that curating is essentially such a bureaucratic activity, and lots of it is, though there's elements, huge important elements, that's why we're all in it, it's the creative, but we should stop pretending otherwise, it's really ridiculous and damaging.

PON: One of the issues that you mentioned earlier, one of the issues that continually comes up in relation to contemporary curatorial discourse is the lack of criticality, which is one of the reasons why I asked you to define what you think is a good art exhibition, and one could argue that in the sixties and seventies a lot of people that became critics, those same intellectually engaged 'freelance knowledge providers', are ultimately now becoming curators, and to a certain extent post-graduate curatorial programmes have become

saturated. As someone who has studied at De Appel as a student, and you're now teaching on De Appel curatorial training programme, do you think that we need any more postgraduate curatorial training programmes, maybe they are responsible for the lack?

AF: I think it's no problem; I think it's like asking do we need more artists? The point is we need good ones.

PON: Do we need any more international art biennials?

AF: We need good ones. It's a dog eat dog world out there, what the hell, you know. I wouldn't want to stop any kind of possibility. The point is to discuss and define why things are good and to react strongly against things that are not.

PON: Which of your own curatorial projects would you describe as being most significant in expanding the notion of what a contemporary art curator does?

AF: I think the one, maybe the 'Paraeducational Department' at Witte de With in Rotterdam with Sarah Pierce, because it tried to argue both about what the cultural institution in any city might supply to its community, in to my mind, an interesting way, and it also asked nice questions about ideas of when we minimally articulate things in quiet and small ways, whether they are any less relevant within the art sphere, and it was a conscious reaction to a feeling that there was in Rotterdam city that Catherine David's program at that time wasn't spectacular enough, wasn't populist enough. So it would seem very important on that level to ask those questions, and on another really simple level, I really liked it because this notion of inviting a guest curator, which of course becomes a kind of mannerism on another level, it seemed interesting to me to think about, instead of mirroring the activity of curating, could we mirror another activity of the institution instead, and namely that of providing kind of educational space. So on that level, for it opened up a lot of the questions around curating.

PON: If you do a google search on the word curating, a prefix that recurs is the word 'dynamic', and that we are in a dynamic phase of

curation meaning that there are certain kind of slight shifts in the current state of play, and those slight shifts will ultimately dictate and produce the future of what curating actually becomes, and perhaps curating as a cultural focus point ultimately necessitates this dynamic phase to actually continue because if we were to actually name it, in order to actually bring a close to it, in order to fix it in some way, there will be a shift away from curating as central to the discourse particularly within art magazines and current contemporary art discourse, and there will be a shift away from curating onto the next thing. Do you think that this is perhaps true?

AF: It's a really interesting analysis. Maybe it is true. Yeah, it's like the term experimental constantly comes up as well, and we're all thinking in classic ways of redefining or redeveloping what we're doing, and that's why I liked what I said earlier about Frederique making her solo shows, that there's a very particular strategy that she's found that is interesting but isn't about OK, we've done too much of this, let's go on to that, it's a very classical strategy and just does that. I think there's a huge amount of self-preservation going on around curating constantly. Again it's why I was talking about this idea of the erosion of practice because curating is sort of constantly trying to justify it. So yeah, I think that could be true.

PON: Thanks.

END OF TAPE

ANDREA FRASER

New York, 04-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: Your recent exhibition at Belkin Art Gallery was called 'Exhibition'. What was your thinking behind that?

ANDREA FRASER: That show at the Belkin it was in 2002 and it's actually the first, it is the first exhibition that I've done in a way as an artist, that is the first show that is a collection of works rather than a project or an installation. Just about all of my other shows have either been single projects or installations, often installations of other artists' work. So, and the work in that show was actually shown in two gallery exhibitions, which opened two weeks prior to that, in New York, at Petzel Gallery and American Fine Arts. Actually I called it 'Exhibition', because one of the main pieces in the show is called 'Exhibition', and it's a piece where I'm performing, it juxtaposes footage of me performing in carnival parades in Rio de Janeiro in costume, with footage of me dancing in a kind of black box studio, in the same costume, inter-edited. And that's called 'Exhibition', and it's basically, it's a play on exhibitionism, or notions of the exhibitionist, exhibitionism as exhibition. What I was interested in with that piece in particular was trying to reflect on the appropriation of popular cultural spectacle, and its displacement into the museum, particularly through the media of video and performance art, and the kind of spectacularisation of the artist and the artist's body in that. And I don't know if it's a terribly successful piece in those terms. But that was the motivation behind it, so it's actually probably the least kind of, one of the least curatorial shows that I've done.

PON: And how would you define or describe the relationship between curatorial strategies and artistic production within your work?

AF: Well, I have, I mean I often, I usually describe myself as an artist who's been identified with institutional critique, and I came to - quote unquote - institutional critique through early contact with people like Douglas Crimp, Benjamin Buchloh and

Craig Owens, both as teachers and through their work, I had contact with all, I studied with all of them, or worked with them as editors very early on. And then in 1985 I wrote about Louise Lawler's work. Craig Owens, who was the editor of *Art in America* at that time, gave me the opportunity to write about Louise Lawler's work for *Art in America*. Well actually before that, my sort of first work of institutional critique was actually an artists' book in the form of an exhibition brochure. There were two pieces that I had done before I wrote about Louise's work which actually already sort of set up what I intended to do.

PON: What year was this?

AF: '84. One was an exhibition of an artists' book in the form of an exhibition brochure that quoted material from, it was a sort of super imposition of what would be a catalogue on de Kooning's women and a catalogue on Raphael's Madonna and Child paintings and there are images superimposed on this text that's intercut about those artists. And then I also did a piece that involved buying posters at the gift shop of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and silk screening over them, over the images of the paintings that were reproduced texts that I quoted from wall labels that went with those works in the museum's collections, sort of in the kind of advertising. So I had already started to take, sort of, the practices of appropriation that were so prevalent in the 1980s and moved them from appropriating image and text to appropriating forms and formats, sort of institutional forms and formats, so posters, exhibition brochures, and trying to work within the sites, not physical sites because I didn't have access to those sites but sort of, you know, graphic or discursive sites. And what Louise's work added to that model for me was her early work, a lot of which she did while she was working at Leo Castelli Gallery, and others where she was not only appropriating images and texts or forms and formats but positions and functions. And she did, after Marcel Broodthaers and perhaps Christian Boltanski, I mean there are other examples like Oldenburg and so forth, of

artists that are appropriating the curatorial role, but her project at the Walther Athenaeum, which I believe was in 1984, and her first exhibition at Metro Pictures, which was I believe in 1982, are pretty early examples, and for me central examples of artists appropriating curatorial roles. And in the context of Louise's early work, that was, she was doing that after having already engaged a lot of other sort of forms and formats, and appropriated positions and functions although not so explicitly you know, but that were implied by what she was producing, like making artworks that were sending out invitations, or making artworks that were in the form of match books, so being a publicist, being a promoter and taking up those kind of roles. At that time I don't think I was particularly familiar with Marcel Broodthaers' work, I'm not a Broodthaers' person. I mean he, I don't know, he gives me a headache! My main influences from that generation have been Hans Haacke, Michael Asher and Daniel Buren. And at some point I also became aware of Christian Boltanski's work from the seventies, and I've always been a big fan of his inventory work from '72. And one of the things that I think is so important about Boltanski's inventory work is also in the context of the sort of redefining what constitutes culture within an institutional context. So I think he was one of the first artists who began to consider coming out of pop art, and when the debates in New York were still framed in terms of this mass popular, in terms of pop art, kind of pop art discourse of high versus kind of commercial culture, Boltanski introduced this anthropological, ethnographic dimension of the notion of culture into art practice in a way that I don't think anyone else really did, you know, with the inventory work, and with other work that he did in the seventies that perhaps took on photography and so forth. But I became aware of that later. So under the influence of, partly of Louise but also coming out of thinking about feminist performance practice, I started doing performances in the form of museum tours, and that's not taking up a curatorial role but it's already sort of moving into, and expanding, you know, the notion of appropriation, sort of appropriation as the basis of a critically

reflexive, interventionary strategy, within an institutional context. But not only expanding that to the performance of functions and the appropriation of positions, but initially I was more interested in educational functions and positions, but also because I was interested in language and speech, so that led me towards the specialist lectures and so forth. And the first project that I did in which I took a curatorial role was in 1992, at the invitation of Larry Rinder - Lawrence Rinder - when he was at the University Art Museum in Berkeley, and I did a show called 'Aren't They Lovely', which focused on one specific bequest to the museum by a woman who had died and basically left the entire contents of her home. I mean the will was one sentence. And so there was an archive at the museum that documented the process in which professionals from the museum went through her life, went through the remains of her life. I mean it's very sort of Boltanski-ish in the sense that one of his early inventory pieces was a woman who had died, I think it was a woman in Oxford, was a woman who died, and decided what was art and what wasn't art, decided what would be thrown away, what would be given away, what would be sold off at a used secondhand furniture dealer, what would go to the library at the university, what would come to the museum, what would be exception, what would not be exception. So I did a show that then reflected on, it contained everything that was at the museum that came from this woman, including more than half of the objects that hadn't actually been exceptions, and included her eyeglasses, and coins, and medals, and souvenirs and photographs and then there was about, I don't know, two or three hundred texts in the show, object labels and all those, that included conservators' reports, very critical evaluations of objects on the part of museum curators and directors. I was interested in looking at the exhibition and the museum as a site of struggle between, you know I'm a kind of follower of Pierre Bourdieu, and he describes some distinction between two relations to culture, what he calls the domestic relationship to culture and a pedantic relationship to culture. So I was looking at this material, and at the museum, as a kind of site of struggle between

these two relations to culture, without necessarily… In this particular instance it was the museum and the professionals, and that kind of pedantic relationship to culture and those systems of classification and evaluation that had the upper hand and who were in a position of power. And this woman was in fact destitute, and you know was living like in an unheated attic in Paris with her Renoir's beside her. It was operatic you know, it was really like *La Bohème* or something. So that was my first curatorial project and after that I did a couple. In that instance I actually was, that was the same year if you remember that Fred Wilson did 'Mining the Museum' in Baltimore. I don't know what his contract was. My contract with the museum in Berkeley was I was there as a, I had a curator contract. And they have a programme called the matrix programme, which is probably, if they were going to invite me as an artist at that time I would have been in the matrix programme, which is their sort of young artist project room. But it wasn't a matrix thing, it was that I had two huge galleries at the museum, and it was like a major exhibition that I did as a curator, that was my contract. And I was paid a curator's fee. Although what was interesting about that situation, the kind of question of, and I've always sort of taken this as one of the important sort of lines that can be drawn between curators and curatorial roles, of artists in curatorial roles, is what my, the definitions of my autonomy in that role and what I was able to do that a curator might not have been able to do. And I turned up some pretty damaging material that any other museum would not have put on display because it would have undermined any future effort to secure bequests and donations.

PON: For example…?

AF: Well, there were documents that I put sort of side-by-side that showed correspondence between this woman and the Director of the museum, or the President of the university, that showed their bad faith in negotiating with her. And on the one hand you heard her sort of, her sort of grandiose self-representations, which

were clearly grandiose, and the museum's response, which was to humour her and flatter her and encourage those representations. And then internal documents, which clearly revealed that they did not have as high an opinion of her as they had indicated in their correspondence to her. And then very critical internal evaluations of the artworks themselves, of many of the artworks that, you know, that came. So, the show ended with some of the works being de-accessioned, and the rationale for the de-accessioning was clearly in contradiction to her wishes as stated in documents that I turned up, although now actually recently the first of the collection and almost everything else has been de-accessioned to this. So I mean it was quite damaging. But Berkeley being what it is, it didn't come up, you know. If it had been anywhere else in the world, if it had been in just about any other museum in the United States, there would have been a huge conflict. And there's a hilarious story about Michael Asher's contribution to 'Museum as Muse'. They commissioned him to do a special project, Kynaston McShine commissioned him to do this thing. You know how they put a disclaimer in his brochure. So Michael Asher's project was to make a kind of catalogue of de-accessioned works, that was his project. And at some point in the same process, I mean and the catalogue was his work - it's a book, it's an artist's book, it's an artwork - and Kynaston McShine started to insist that he be able to write a statement, include a statement in this book, which is an artwork. I mean that's a curatorial intervention in an artwork, right. And I actually was in L.A. at the time and I was having dinner with Michael Asher and he was telling me about this, and he was asking should I do it, and I said of course you should do it, that's the piece. I don't know, I shouldn't represent that this way but it's like my inside story. I mean I just thought, because you know what that disclaimer is about, basically what Kynaston McShine writes is that even though the museum does the de-accessioned artworks, we always take, you know we take the money that we make from selling the artworks and we invest that money in new artworks and will put the name of the person who gave the actual artworks on the label

of the new artworks. It was all about protecting their donor base, that's what it's about.

PON: You mentioned Daniel Buren as being an influence. In his essay 'An Exhibition of an Exhibition' was a critique of the idea of an exhibition as a gesamtkunstwerk and he claimed that the curator as the author ultimately devalues and absorbs the subjectivity of the artworks. Do you think that's necessarily true?

AF: It's something that Fred Wilson likes to point out when he talks about, when you sort of ask him questions about what it means to take up a curatorial role, and he likes to point out that until the nineteenth century, or even the late nineteenth century, few artworks ever had titles. Artists didn't title artworks. Titles were ascribed to artworks by curators, or by collectors, or by the people who worked with artworks. But then at a certain point they became part of the text you know of the artwork, as if they belong to the artwork as much as a modern title does where it's considered part of the artist's intention. I mean why I think that's a great anecdote is, you know, considering the versions between artists and curators or artistic roles and curatorial roles, and the kinds of conflicts and contradictions between them, one has to take into account the formation of the interests of artists and the formation of the interests of curators. And of course artists can be taking a role defending their interests against the encouragement of curators, and representing curators as appropriating artistic prerogatives, but at the same time it's a little dicey, particularly if you're an artist who has spent years questioning those artistic prerogatives. And why Buren is such an important figure to me in the history of institutional critique is because he didn't only write 'The Function of the Museum' he also wrote 'The Function of the Studio' and his critique of the institution wasn't a critique of the museum - his institutional critique is often misrepresented - but a critique of artistic practice as just as much a part of

the institution of art as the role of the curator or the museum. So I take a very strong position against, I mean I think there are questions to be raised, but I think one always has to sort of bracket off certain sorts of now very institutionalised, avant-garde assumptions about the roles of artists and about the transgressive prerogatives of artists, and recognise that those avant-garde traditions are part of the institution, and not just because of a process of institutional incorporation, they've always been a part of the institution. I mean when I think of the institution of art I don't think about museums or arts administrators or arts professionals or something like that, I think of the field of art as a whole - that's the institution. And then you can talk about specific institutions within that field, but the artist is one of those specific institutions, and is a much older and much more institutionalised institution within the field of art than the curator is. You know what I'm saying. So that's a kind of roundabout response, but I would be very careful about that. I mean certainly for me, I've run into it in my work doing installations of other artists' work, like in Berkeley, those were all dead artists basically, they were all dead artists. In Munich I did a project of Kunstverein Munich where I borrowed works from all the board members of the institution. Many of those were living artists. Of those that are living there was at least one who was a friend of mine. When I did a project at the 'Whitney Biennial' in '93 that involved interviewing the curators and making an audio-tour of the exhibition, one of the curator's rationale basically for threatening to censor me in that project, was that it was sort of unethical of them, and/or of me, but of them to put me in a position of commenting on the other artists' work, that their kind of curatorial role required in a way that they protect the other artists from that kind of critique, which also implies an idea that their role is to, I mean it was a very interesting kind of configuration, because on the one hand they were defining their role as being to sort of protect the autonomy of the artists' work, and within a sort of, you know their divisions and notions

of curatorial respect for artistic intention and so forth. But I was shifted to that side because I was taking a position of appropriating a curatorial function and producing some commentary you know. So I lost some of my autonomy then. So there were those conflicts and there are ethical issues for me, and it's very tricky. And it also comes up with performance work that I do, and *Official Welcome*, which is a recent performance where I quote a lot of other artists. And at first I wasn't going to release the sources, even though they were very specific, because I didn't want it to become about that. But of course it is about that, and in fact my competition with other artists is also part of the dynamics of the field, and it's one of the things that that piece is about anyway, so I'm not sure, it's not easy to bracket those issues off. We have to be aware of that.

PON: I mean you've answered the question in a roundabout way but in the *Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls a certain cultural 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practice of the past like that of Marcel Duchamp, Kiesler or Lilly Reich.

AF: Or even Alfred Barr. I mean nobody knows about 'Joe Shoeshine Stand', you know, and that's why he was like fired. He moved a shoeshine stand into the gallery. That's just about as radical as you know anything Arte Povera did or anything anybody's done in the eighties.

PON: But do you think that this 'amnesia', this repressed history somewhat impacts or has affected the way in which you perceive contemporary curating?

AF: Yeah I mean I think the art world generally is sort of rife with amnesia. You see it in artistic practices all the time. And it's not surprising that it also exists when it comes to curatorial practices, I mean. And perhaps it's sort of symptomatic of the weakness of the professionalisation of

curating, at least with regard to establishing a kind of, compared to other academic disciplines, you know, where I think you see less of that in academic disciplines where people are really required to study precedents. And curating, it is because curating is caught between scholarship and showmanship. I mean that's the conflict of curating. And of course things are moving more and more in the direction of showmanship, which means that historical perspective, both on art and on curatorial practice itself is going to diminish with the rise of that showmanship, where what's important is not what's innovative but what's effective in some terms of audience response, right. And one sees that in artistic practices too, and in curatorial decisions about artistic practice and the kind of criteria that curators put into place and apply in making choices about what artists to show, and their gatekeeper function, or their tastemaker function, right.

PON: How do you think curators or contemporary artists through exhibitions or curatorial projects could address this issue of amnesia?

AF: Well I mean there are conflicts within the discourse. I haven't been following, and the last curatorial conference I went to I think was in 2000. I went through and it was like, I was on this circuit for a couple of years and then I decided I didn't need to do this anymore. So it's been a couple of years. But my senses is that, you know, it's a kind of ridiculously fractured field, and the fractures are along lines of you know a kind of, you know there's this sort of impulse to professionalisation that is between the academy and the corporation. So in the direction of the academy you have an emphasis on scholarship, an emphasis of quantifiable identifiable competencies that belong to curating, and that tends to be conservative in many ways, and in others it's not conservative because it has the potential to resist other forces particularly in terms of showmanship, in terms of the demands being made on curating from increasingly sort of corporate museums, and entertainment going on in museums, right. So then

you have this sort of trajectory of curating, you know professionalisation, that is more institution-based, where you have sort of management and administrative skills taking precedence over scholarship, and you see that particularly in terms of museum directors and museum managers who increasingly don't have a specialisation in the artistic field of their institutions. They're there as managers. And institutional priorities, which diminish the autonomy and authority of curators, except in terms of their managerial efficiency and so forth. And then you have this other arena where curators are seeing themselves as cultural producers and as collaborators, not necessarily with artists but you know, this is much more prevalent in Europe than here, and to a degree in Germany and Switzerland, and to some extent, I mean in some places in Britain as well, are seeing themselves as cultural producers, as activists who are working on urban issues, who see the exhibition as a site of, as a political site, as a political tool, where there's a tendency toward wanting to break down the boundaries that professionalisation is reinforcing. Because what happens with professionalisation, the process of professionalisation is all about sort of reinforcing, and is a process of increasing the position of labour and increasing fragmentation, of increasing specialisation, which shores up divisions of labour and boundaries, between artists, between curators and everybody else. I mean that's what professionalisation is partly about right, so that's one of the contradictions. And then you have this other tendency, which sort of defines precisely around the discourse of breaking down those boundaries, a political discourse around breaking down those boundaries of specialisation, and collaboration. And you have to say you know that it's in fact... I remember putting once to a student, I've forgot exactly where, there was something we were reading, that one has to ask the question of why at this moment is there such a challenge to that. I mean why at this moment there are those two trajectories. And my tendency is to see that, but you know the tendency of curators to sort of redefine themselves as cultural producers against the

forces of professionalisation as really being like a symbolic last gasp, you know, that in fact is functioning as a ideological cover for the structural tendencies of the field and of the profession. And that's why I tend not to give them all that much credence, even if I do with the politics. I feel like it's a little bit of a social fantasyland, a sociological fantasyland to believe that. And in a way it kind of runs parallel to, where it runs parallel to artists, and also it's this idea that artists have always had, like this avant-garde tradition that you know that individuals making individual decisions about practices, and innovations about practices, can swim against the stream of social developments in the institution.

PON: Curators are now often seen as a creative component within the production of the artwork or the mediation of the artwork within an exhibitionary context and I mean even the verb 'to curate' and the adjective 'curatorial' have only emerged within the last few years. So it seems to suggest the more proactive kind of involvement within the sites of production.

AF: Yeah. I mean I think it's like the art world. I don't know, I haven't been spending all that time in Europe recently, and I used to spend a lot of time in Europe and now I'm kind of like what I see is what's going on here. And what's going on here is so dominated by the forces of the market. And institutions are so dominated by the market here, and it's hard for me not to see what's going on in Europe, and the sort of apparent sites of resistance to those tendencies in Europe, just as sort of symptoms of the same phenomenon. And that might be due to my sort of near-sightedness, viewing from New York. But I tend not to be convinced you know.

PON: I tend to get very frustrated when I'm in New York because I realise very quickly that it is so market-driven. I think the thing that somehow drives curatorial practice is the market.

AF: It's the same in Britain. I mean Britain is worse.

PON: The same in Britain, yeah, but I think the most significant developments for curating is probably going to be in the biennial system in Europe where the same artists are exhibiting in many of the biennials every couple of years. And it's also the same shortlist of curators.

AF: Well it's produced what a friend of mine has called 'art for curators'.

PON: You could call it the curatorial market?

AF: I mean art for curators, and it is a market, that's exactly it, it's also a market. And it's not a market that's structured in the same way as the American market, it's not a market that's defined by all the money that's being poured, it's not a market that's defined by the money that collectors are paying for artworks, but it is a market, and for me, especially to think of those kind of curatorial claims, the political claims of some of those curatorial practices and the artistic practices that they support within the context of those biennials, almost all of which are so politically motivated. And I was recently invited to be in a biennial in the United Arab Emirates. And I mean the invitation was late and there was no way that I could produce a sort of site-specific work. I mean this for me was like so symptomatic of what biennials have become. So I'm invited at a late date to produce something site-specific about the biennial phenomenon. Note, please note, we do not think it would be a good idea for you to reflect on the political situation in the United Arab Emirates. It's like, give me a fucking break, you know. How am I, you know that demand, that yes we reflect on the biennial, we reflect on the cultural phenomenon, but without linking it to the political conditions of that cultural phenomenon? Or we can do work on the politics of globalisation without ever reflecting on how or what our roles are within that. I mean of course people do. You know

then you have to draw lines, and those are questions of criteria. It's like well, what is a convincing and effective reflection on that? What is a convincing and reflective critical practice within that context? But this is so symptomatic. And the other thing that's so symptomatic is that I was told that I could have a budget of ten thousand dollars but no fee, right, and this is typical. And what does that do? Do an analysis. That again reinforces divisions of labour where artists are managers of production processes that they subcontract and farm out, because it's cheaper for artists under those conditions to hire somebody else to produce a high production value piece than for the artist him or herself to do any work. I can't afford to do that. And then what you end up with is a system where exhibitions subsidise high value products that are then sold on the market. That's what that system produces, that's what that economy produces. And biennials are completely complicit in shoring up that economy and supporting it.

PON: Could you then tell me a little bit about the context and criteria for the speech on 'Documenta' that you did in '92?

AF: Oh, yeah that was, I was invited there during 'Documenta' by *Texte zur Kunst* and they had organised this event in Kassel. All the participants, well all the artist participants were not participants in 'Documenta' officially. And it was set up by *Texte zur Kunst*, so it didn't have anything to do, there was no invitation from 'Documenta'. And I wrote that, that was right. That was a time I think I had just done 'Aren't They Lovely' at the University Art Museum, which I was talking to you about. I was working on this project at the Kunstverein in Munich and I had just finished writing a paper called 'An Artist's Statement', which was the sort of moment when I really kind of became a Bourdieuian, I mean synonymous... I'd started, I mean I'd been reading Bourdieu for a number of years but that was when I really kind of, well I thought okay this is it. So that was the context. I don't remember who else was... I mean it was a weird group of

people speaking. There's a little book - have you seen the book? There's a little book that *Texte zur Kunst* published of those lectures, and I know Tom Crowe was there, I know John Miller was there. I'm trying to remember who else participated.

PON: What was the content of the speech?

AF: Oh the content? It says I'm an artist; I would have liked to be invited to participate in 'Documenta 9'. Whether it's a good exhibition or a bad exhibition has no bearing on the fact that I would have liked to be in it, nor does who the curator is, nor does its history, or ideological function matter. And I kind of go on like that, and then I say you know I would have liked to have been invited to participate in 'Documenta 9' because that invitation would have constituted a moment of professional recognition that I would find narcissistically stabilising, narcissistically gratifying. And I kind of go on from there, I mean it's a kind of performance, it's a self-reflective piece. I know it because actually I have a book coming with MIT Press, and it's in it, so I was just like adding a name in there. Well I remember most of my scripts you know, but anyway. But what it's about, I mean that piece is sort of about the time, it's about temporality, and it's about sort of symbolic incorporation and that's what it's about. So it's not really about 'Documenta', it's more about sort of being an artist. What those kinds of exhibitions and being invited to be in those exhibitions means for an artist you know, and the sort of promise of arriving you know, and of being brought in, and of being consecrated.

PON: Do you think 'Documenta' is ultimately about the canon or about the canonisation of a particular history of art?

AF: I don't know. I mean I've never been in a 'Documenta'. I don't think I'm going to be in the next one either - I have a feeling. I don't think I'm going to be in that one. I don't actually, I mean despite the fact that I wrote that paper it

doesn't bother me you know. You know you're an artist, and there are these exhibitions. 'Documenta', as I say in that speech, one of the things that make 'Documenta' so particularly legitimising, is that it only happens every five years. And it's very different from biennial, even triennial exhibitions, because an artist's public lifespan tends to be two or three years. An artist, most artists disappear after three years or so. I mean that's kind of like, you can have a three year career and then there's a sort of point. Then a lot of people stick around, or you kind of disappear. I don't know. I mean I'm making this up, but it's my intuitive conviction. I'm convinced that that's sort of like, you know you see it, you have a few years and then you kind of fade away, or you don't fade away. So if you're still around from five years to five years, then you've sort of survived something. I mean a lot of people who get into biennial exhibitions disappear, or they get on the circuit. I mean now there's a circuit. But at that time there wasn't a circuit, so at that time there was the 'Whitney Biennial', the 'Venice Biennale', the 'San Paulo Biennial', and the 'Carnegie International' that was about it. And there was 'Documenta'. And there was Münster; I actually am going to be in 'Sculpture Project Münster' in 2007. I was invited to that. So that's every ten years, but that's a much more specific, but it's not like 'Documenta' because it has a very specific kind of thematic, scale and everything. So for me that is why 'Documenta' gets to be, it does have to do with, I think it's the five year plan. There's a certain rarity. It's kind of what they call a scarcity of years rather than numbers. It doesn't have to do with its size; it has to do with its infrequency, and with the kind of survival that that implies. But I mean 'Documenta' in particular has become such a sort of ideological battleground of late that I think its function for canon formation is actually undermined. In a way that may not be bad, I mean because I don't think necessarily canonisation, I think one has to be ambivalent about it.

PON: Ute Meta Bauer used the idea of 'Documenta' as a canon as a

defence against the various critiques which were directed at 'Documenta 11' for being so expansive and the criticism that there was so much work that involved spending a lot of time with it, and it was impossible to actually experience all the work even if you were there for two weeks. Her defense was that 'Documenta' is a kind of Western canon and we wanted to include works that were somewhat inaccessible, somewhat peripheral or outside the dominant centers of contemporary art.

AF: It's contradictory. I mean it's contradictory because most of it, I mean the claims - again I didn't read it, I didn't see that 'Documenta' and I didn't actually read all that much on it but you know it seemed pretty obvious that the curatorial position was that there were political criteria and political intentions behind curatorial criteria. And that one of the criterions was that the work be politically effective? So there's a contradiction there, because obviously for a work to be politically effective people have to experience it, in its demanding temporality, or whatever, demanding complexity, and its original context, but also in its complexity? So if you make a huge exhibition that brings together all of those kind of political works, where 1) it is decontextualised and 2) people cannot possibly engage all of it, in the complexity that makes it effective politically, then you're undermining the political claims of the work and also the political claims of your curatorial project. And it's also kind of contradicted by, I mean, you know, it's what happens for me, it's perfectly symptomatic of how most political claims actually function in an art context, is that it's not in fact about the politics, the sort of substance of the politics of the work, it's about canonising a political position for a notion of political practice, where the political is basically a symbolic statement, it's not functionally political. It's symbolically political, and it functions symbolically within the field of art as political, not politically in the world you know.

PON: Since you began practicing in the eighties, do you think there are dominant forms of curating that have developed within the last twenty years?

AF: Well, I mean there are a lot of curatorial camps of which we've sort of discussed. I mean scholarly exhibitions within museums, you know, the engaged kind of political exhibition, the kind of collaborative or at least a notion of a collaborative relationship between curators and artists and publics. There was a model that emerged in the eighties and seems to have died out, which is the sort of discourse-driven thematic exhibition, although one still sees that, that's still the dominant model among curatorial students. It seems to have sort of died out in terms of the real exhibition world. You know in galleries you basically don't see curating in galleries anymore, except at like the Larry Gagogian level where it's basically doing museum shows and they're not really for sale. You don't see… And that's where the sort of art fair has become the dominant model of presentation of art in the commercial world, whereas I think previously galleries did actually have shows that made sense curatorially, where galleries actually represented something artistically and not just a market position. And that's gone, that's over I think.

PON: I assume you've taught on a number of these post-graduate curating programmes. Do you think that they've impacted or had an influence on curatorial practice since the late eighties?

AF: I'm not sure, I kind of think it's too early to tell. My sense is that most of the graduates of these programmes are not achieving high level curatorial positions. Where they are, it's based on other training that they've had, or other, it's based on the same kind of individual factors that have made curators prominent in the past, or make artists prominent, you know, which has to do with being extremely motivated and being in the right places at the right time and knowing the right people and so on and so forth, or having some other kind of art history background,

or having some other curatorial. At Bard a lot of the students, at Bard the international students come in with quite a bit of experience, many of them, you know. I have a student from Germany who already has a PhD in Art History, a student from Venezuela who had a fairly high level curatorial position there, a student from Eastern Europe who had started a very important artist-run space. But my sense is that the shift within museums away from, you know because historically curators in high level positions at museums have PhD's, or Art History PhD's, and you know traditionally those museums didn't show a lot of contemporary art where that PhD wasn't much good. And there would be people in lower level positions who only had a Masters, who maybe had arrived there from some other kind of training background, but generally they weren't doing big shows you know. And then you have the handful of curators who kind of fought their way up to prominence in contemporary curating through being everywhere you know, like Hans Ulrich Obrist or through having really been involved over a long period of time, and usually were involved in writing art criticism. So, I mean... I know quite a few students from Bard who are now working. Bard was the first degree programme in curating here. In Europe there are a few people that I know who earlier, at an earlier point went through in Germany, there was a programme in Nuremberg where I did a lot of work with and there's a programme of cultural studies at the University of Nuremberg. And there are a few people who came out of those programmes in Germany who are more active in Europe, but none of them to my knowledge have risen to the kind of prominence that Roger Beurgel did; who is the next curator of 'Documenta' and is an interesting case. He actually has a PhD in Art History or Sociology right? So I mean he never did a curatorial training programme. So in a way it's like, you could call that a vote. Someone could do an analysis of what that means, so the people who selected him selected somebody and selected a young guy. I mean okay it's a young person, so this is the generation of the graduate curatorial study programmes, that's his generation, but they didn't select a graduate from those programmes, they selected someone from another field. The Whitney

ISP is different. That programme has been around since the late sixties, it's not a degree programme, and most of the, a lot of the people, I mean it's very specific. And it's really not a curatorial programme. I mean they do a show, but what they do in the programme it's much more a theory programme.

PON: How do you think institutional critique has changed? Or do you still think that that's a relevant term, and a relevant activity today?

AF: What I say about institutional critique is that institutional critique is a sort of specific, as a specific sort of art historical movement that I think emerged out of specific historical and social moment in the late sixties, is in a way over, and I don't think the conditions for it exist anymore in a way. But I tend to, for myself and in terms of my own practice, I define institutional critique fundamentally as a reflexive practice, as a practice increasingly influenced by Bourdieu's notion of reflexive sociology, and it's always been there I think, institutional critique, but for me if I practise, you know what I say about institutional critique is that I don't do work about museums because I think they're so interesting or relevant, or about the art world because I think it's so important, I do the work that I do because I feel like, my notion of not only what being an artist is but I think generally, it comes out of a sense that we have an actual obligation to understand the relations that we reproduce in executing the functions of our profession or activities. I mean as professionals, as citizens, as social subjects, as members of society. And art is a field that gives you an opportunity that many other fields do not give you the same opportunity, not only to reflect but also to try to intervene, and to create a practice based on that reflection, and that's to me what institutional critique is. I mean institutional critique is just a, for me it's just a kind of convenient rubric and one that I do, a practice that I identify with historically and that have influenced me. For me I think curators can function that way. I

think people in other fields can function that way, I don't think that's like a specific demand that I would make of art or artists to be reflexive about what they do.

PON: This brings me to the question of performativity, which can be understood as the constitution of a meaning through practice or a certain act. In the short essay published on the Kunstverein Munich website: 'Reflections on the concept of the performative' written by Katharina Schlieben, 'performative-curating' is represented as a dynamic process of mediation and self-reflexivity where the 'per-formed' events remain transparent about their production process whilst remaining open-ended and unfixed - a kind of materialised thinking through speech acts. This is a kind of performative curating as self-reflexive, and which, the relationship between the idea and the idea in practice are self-reflectively reproduced or produced within the exhibition. Do you think that performativity is a self-reflective institutional critique, or vice versa?

AF: I don't know, I would have to, I don't know that I've seen, I can't think of any exhibitions offhand. I would have to, I don't know, think of an exhibition that I've seen. When I've done exhibitions as a curator, that's what I'm trying to do, you know, although I think of differences and I might be a little bit sceptical, my immediate tinge of scepticism when you describe that was the sort of focus on curator. And one of the dangers of reflexivity that we've seen played out in institutional critique - and I'm sure I've fallen prey to, on more than one occasion, and maybe some people would argue always - is the potential for narcissism. And 'Museum as Muse' is a perfect example of where so-called institutional critique becomes a kind of institutional narcissism, and also curatorial narcissism. And for example I was participating in a conference organised by the Education Department of the Guggenheim - they had two, one in New York, one in Mexico City, called 'Museum as Medium' - and there's a book by James Putnam.

PON: Yeah it's an awful book.

AF: It's an awful book and he was the keynote speaker, and I was like tearing my hair in the audience. And it's basically, I mean these things are basically about curators and museum people saying you know what we do must be so interesting because artists want to emulate us. Well this is what I was, basically what I was hearing over there. I mean in situations where it's mostly curators and where they sort of celebrate institutional critique, and it's like extremely, there's a kind of narcissism in that, artistic practices that appropriate curatorial practices fuel, and it does go the other way round too. But I think where it goes the other way round, you know the idea of the curator as making the complete artwork as the curator as cultural producer are better instances of curatorship emulating artistic positions. Anyway so I guess there's always a danger, there's always that danger.

PON: You did *Museum Highlights* in 1989 and it represented an institutional critique of a particular museological art tourism. It is a very highly visible, overly represented, almost emblematic work within recent institutional critique discourse. How do you think about that, looking back at that work now? I mean does it still have the same resonance for you?

AF: Yeah, you know it still functions for me, and I think it functions… My critique of that piece, which led me to change my performance practices, was the appropriation position of the tour guide, who in American museums are usually volunteers and usually women, and that performance was widely read as me constructing an alter ego that was based on some kind of I mean various sort of disparaging representation and disparaging descriptions of who these women are, sort of under educated volunteer kind of upper middle class sort of bourgeois women who volunteer, who don't really know what they're talking about and are sort of dizzy and crazy. And I'm horrified by that representation, because what I'm quoting…

PON: It's certainly not true.

AF: No, I mean it's not true in reality and it's also not what that piece is about at all you know. So it's one of the dangers of those, it's one of the dangers of that kind of appropriation in terms of displacement. And, I mean I look now, it's becoming increasingly clear to me. I wrote a kind of update in a way of *Museum Highlights*, it's not really an update, but in a way it is. I did a piece called, *Little Frank and His Carp*, 2001, which I wouldn't call institutional critique actually as a piece, not really. I think it doesn't function in that sense. I mean I like it, it's fine, it's funny, everybody likes it, but probably for the wrong reasons which is my failure. Anyway, but I wrote a very long paper which is coming out in this book, which is an analysis of the voiceover that's in *Little Frank and His Carp*, which is the introductory audio-work that Guggenheim's about, and I spent a lot of time in Bilbao working on the project, I did a lot of research in terms of the social situation, the economic situation and the history of the ETA and about the Guggenheim. So that text is in a way an update of *Museum Highlights* and the Foucaultian critique of museums as institutions of confinement that *Museum Highlights* is partly based on, and a lot of early institutional critique from the eighties, from Douglas Crimp to Tony Bennett, was involved with. I think *Museum Highlights* is a kind of contradiction and a contribution to that debate and it's not about the institution of confinement. I mean Tony Bennett was also talking about class in *The Birth of the Museum*, but still very much within sort of Foucaultian terms of surveillance and technologies of control. And *Museum Highlights* is really about, okay yeah we can talk about the prison but this is about the poor house and there's a very immediate structural connection between the museum and the poor house within formations of public spheres, urban public spheres in the United States, and of certain public policy. So in that sense I mean I think it's really, I mean it is very trenchant, and there was a lot of research and it's in the footnotes and I think it holds up in those terms. But of course museums have changed

enormously. And my updating it, which as a kind of analysis in terms of the Guggenheim is that you see what this introductory audience for the Guggenheim represents, is basically the way museums have, I won't say incorporated but have responded to that critique. I mean this is an audio tour and it says: 'In the great museums of previous ages rooms linked from one to the other and you must visit them all one after another. Sometimes it can feel as if there's no escape'. It's the Foucaultian' institution of confinement. I mean it's literal. And here there is an escape, and that's the claim. So the argument that I developed is that to think about the museum as an institution of confinement, that if the museums have imposed an order, in fact it's always been an order of freedom in some sense. And museums have always been - and this comes out of Bourdieu - museums have always been an institutionalised form of aesthetic, of the aesthetic, of an aesthetic disposition. Museums are conscious institutions; they were established as institutionalised forms of an aesthetic disposition, and of art. But that's true of nineteenth century museums. It's also true of contemporary museums like the Guggenheim. But it's different in that there are correspondences between that order of freedom and economic conditions and this is sort of Bourdieu's analysis of the aesthetic as sort of representing a negative economic determination as the distance from necessity. But it's a different order of freedom now and it's a different set of economic conditions. And so the kind of freedom that a museum like the Guggenheim is representing today, and whereas the Philadelphia Museum was representing the freedom of the bourgeois patron class, the Guggenheim is representing the freedom of transnational corporate and cultural elites. The freedoms of neo-liberalism, that's what's being represented in that audio tour, in a sort of brilliantly encapsulated, illogical form. And within that sphere and the same is true of biennial exhibitions, and people have said this before in various ways you know, and talk about… And it's this contradictory position that artists are in, and curators are in, as you know as cultural professionals, that yes we have this sort of critical discourse

and critical resources that have been institutionalised, and are at our disposal, and we can claim our roles based on our historic autonomy you know, to speak to the power or to execute a kind of political role, political function in society. But in fact what our social and economic position is, is that we are part of the new transnational elite, you know and we are not only a part of it, we're the poster boys of it. And it's so obvious, you and I've said this in an interview and it sort of says it too, that artists, architects, curators, star architects like Frank Gehry, star curators, and artists, are represented particularly more and more through the sort of popular culture representations of the art world and the fashion representations of the art world as if like all of these consequences of globalisation are just like a sexy lifestyle choice. I mean that's what it is.

PON: It's the last question, have I heard correctly that you're opening a gallery, you plan to open a gallery?

AF: There is a gallery that, there is a kind of artist-run commercial space that will be opening probably in May, and it's a group of about twelve people, and I'm part of the group.

PON: Is there a particular ideology behind the gallery and will it have an historicisation agenda?

AF: There are various ideologies behind the gallery.

PON: There are twelve…

AF: Exactly! [Laughs] Well in the sense that I think one of our agendas - there are different agendas, and I can only speak for the two agendas that I'm most interested in, and one is that it's not a non-profit, it is a commercial space that, no we can't really leave the art world, and we can't leave the art market, not really. In fact I don't think it's possible. And there is something, there is sort of self-marginalising and to avoid what

is self-marginalising about taking up the sort of non-profit position, and to actually try to sell art, but to do it within a context, within a framework and with a discourse that would include research and analysis of what this art market is, what the economics of this art market is, what its relationship to the Bush economy is, to the Bush tax cuts, to the collapse of the stock market, to the loss of confidence in the stock market, to the decline of the dollar. I mean this art market is so symptomatic, you know of the whole kind of economic situation that's been created by Bush policies, so to do that research, to make that analysis, to actually just weigh that in one way or another, I mean either textually or graphically or make that part of the discourse of the space. So that's one of the things that I'm interested in doing. And then the other thing is to, it's an interesting group of artists who are involved, because we all have very strong connections to previous, older, conceptual generations, and one of the things that we're interested in, there is also, two of the people who are involved are curators and critics, one is Ray Anastas, who's an art historian, who tutors at Bard at the Center for Curatorial Studies. She was a member of a group called Reclum, that was active in the seventies, I mean around '79, so she's an art historian, she's not really a curator but she's an art historian, but she teaches at Bard so she's involved in kind of curatorial issues. Then there is Bennett Simpson, who's a curator and a critic, who's now at ICA in Boston. So there's going to be a publication component, but what we're interested in is also putting together both an exhibition programme and a kind of inventory that does have an artistic coherence, which doesn't exist in galleries anymore except for maybe Marian Goodman and Metro Pictures, and Paula Cooper but I'm not so sure.

PON: So you're going to situate the shows in relation to historical paradigms?

AF: No in the first show we'll include artists of my generation,

artists of the eighties, and artists of the sixties, late sixties, and seventies. It's kind of slated to include people like Luis Camnitzer, who was a very important early conceptualist, Lawrence Weiner, Martha Rosler, Dan Graham, Louise Lawler, Alan McCallum, as well as myself, Christian Philip Muller who's involved, probably Gareth James, who's a bit younger than I am. And there is a mix…

PON: Do all those artists already have gallery representation in New York?

AF: And Martha Rosler who no longer has a gallery. No Louise does not work with the gallery. But yes many of them do have gallery representations, but it's not… I have a gallery representation. Well it works like any secondary, I mean it's just standard… I mean not all artists have exclusive contracts with their primary galleries anyway, and very often primary galleries aren't necessarily interested in dealing with everything an artist produces. But the usual situation is that if a work is sold by a secondary gallery then a certain percentage will go to the primary gallery - ten or fifteen per cent.

PON: Will we leave it at that?

AF: Okay.

END OF TAPE* See also interview with Brian Wallis.

LIA GANGITANO

New York, 02-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: Can you tell me about your first curatorial projects or is curator a term that you're comfortable with in defining what you do?

LIA GANGITANO: I recognise that the term curator has significantly changed since I entered the field, and really the way I started, or came to work in a curatorial department, is very different than what's happening now. In about 1986, I was a college undergraduate and I needed a job. There was a part-time work-study position at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. So, I basically took that job and, over time, worked in every department of the museum, from development to video, etc. Within a couple of years, I started working as an assistant registrar. So my background was very much logistical and administrative, and I basically cut school all the time to work on projects there, which were pretty large scale. It was of the era of David Ross, who was the Director, with curators Elisabeth Sussman and David Joselit, some of my curatorial heroes. In a city like Boston, which was so conservative, they were doing what I thought were pretty radical projects. We worked on a big Situationist International show with Centre Pompidou ('On the Passage of a Few People Through a Rather Brief Moment in Time: The Situationist International, 1957-1972', 1989). My first tour was a show called 'American Art of the Late Eighties', which was really my introduction to the work that became really important to me, like Mike Kelley came and did an installation. Another really important show called 'Utopia, Post-Utopia', (1998) that David Joselit was the curator of, included this now iconic post-modern installation by Robert Gober that included his *Untitled Door and Door Frame*, as well as a handwritten joke by Richard Prince, a Meg Webster moss bed which we used to have to water, a Hudson River School landscape painting by Albert Bierstadt. Of course, people in Boston just hated it and the critics thought it was terrible. Years later, when I was walking by St. Mark's Bookstore, I saw a photo of the installation on the cover of a book about post-modernism. We didn't really know that, in time, people would

appreciate these projects a lot more. Anyway, that was my training ground, and, as I said, I was really happy to work, touring the shows, travelling, and just dealing with the basic needs of artists. I briefly left the ICA for a short period of time in 1990 because I went to Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture. I had been a student artist, like a studio painter. And it was there that I made a pretty serious decision, which was that I didn't want to be an artist; I vastly preferred other people's artwork to mine. And when I left Skowhegan, I took a full-time job at the ICA and basically continued working as a registrar until Elisabeth Sussman, at a certain point, just asked me to be the department's curatorial assistant. I didn't really know what that entailed because we all worked together, it was a very non-hierarchical museum that happened to be going through a lot of financial difficulties. So we all sort of did everything. The shift had meaning later because what eventually happened was that I was able to curate shows and to edit publications, as there was a lot of staff change and I stayed. I worked with three directors in the ten years I was there, and I was offered opportunities through the mentorship of curators, I think that's somewhat unusual today. I had just barely graduated with a BA in English and some studio training, so it wasn't like I had studied art in a very traditional manner.

PON: And what was the first curatorial project that you did that was authored by you?

LG: The very first one was a show for a World AIDS Day. It was basically one small room in the museum dedicated to artists whose work was dealing with HIV and AIDS. This was in 1994, and I had organised a video program, also for World AIDS Day in 1992 that was projected on a window of the museum to the street outside.

PON: Was that historical people or people that were working contemporaneously?

LG: A little bit of both. There were some local artists who were working at the time, but also significant for me was that it was the first time that I learned about one particular artist, Mark Morrisroe, who had died years prior in 1989, but I became involved with his estate and therefore involved with Pat Hearn, who was the Executor. Becoming engaged with his work led to later projects like 'Boston School', which I guess was probably the most well known project I did in Boston. I co-curated that exhibition with Milena Kalinovska, who was then the Director. It was the first museum scale exhibition that brought together this group of artists who had all studied more or less around the same time in Boston in the late seventies, early eighties, at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts and Massachusetts College of Art. This included Nan Goldin, Jack Pierson, Philip-Lorca diCorcia, Shellburne Thurber, David Armstrong, and Stephen Tashjian (Tabboo!). We structured the exhibition around Mark Morrisroe's Estate, so Pat, Milena, and I dedicated a floor of the museum to his work. The exhibition concerned the now very well known issues of diaristic photography and the construction of something like an interlocking family album, they all photographed one another. But there was also a lot of talk around the notion of a movement. It's not that we weren't serious about it, but we were somewhat sceptical about this grandiose idea of a movement in photography. Of course, Nan was at a very high peak of her success and hers had become synonymous with this kind of work. She very happily and not with entire seriousness was like, 'oh yeah, we were the Boston School'. She was, of course, making a joke about this sort of style of late nineteenth century portrait painting that these artists were perhaps exposed to if they visited the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum or the Museum of Fine Arts, right down the street from their art schools. What we were suggesting, in a way, was that this kind of sphere of influence or rebellion could happen anywhere. In this case, a bunch of punk rock kids in art school did do something very unselfconsciously that turned out to be a major shift away from documentary style photography, for example, which they were being taught. So, all of a sudden, this

was taken as this canonical term that we had somehow coined with the show. I edited the publication, which also set a certain family in focus - certain connections to dealers in New York who worked with these artists, and these artists themselves, who really advocated for certain friends, like Jack Pierson introduced us to Stephen Tashjian (Tabboo!), so he was the only painter in the show. We just let it be the very dysfunctional family that it was, and the show got a lot of attention and, for better or worse, placed me as a photo person, which I wasn't. I'm certainly not any kind of authority on that. But the fact that it grew out of this AIDS project, and then moved into this sort of strange family of people greatly affected by this kind of loss, made sense in the political climate of the time. And these things have remained at the core of what I think about art. If there's an approach to curating, I really do think that artists generate these ideas and linkages, and that the social dynamic and character of art and artists is a very full curatorial space. I felt I learned so much about the city I was living in for ten years by going back and just seeing where these artists went to hang out, and what they liked to do. I learned that Pat had been an artist. Although she'd already reinvented herself as an art dealer, she had a very interesting past as a video and performance artist in Boston in the seventies. So I guess I would say that looking at those connections for me was definitely the most gratifying part of the project, and it just continued over time I guess.

PON: So the historicisation of art from the past or the historical precedents or precursors and its relationship with the contemporary; has that been quite key to your practice on the whole?

LG: Definitely. My understanding of recent historical precedents like the East Village scene, for example, is that a lot of these people are still working today. The reason I felt interested in the New Museum's 'East Village' show was because of certain people I had met through the 'Boston School' project, like Rene Ricard or

Taylor Mead, people that I see as very much still around and working. We weren't trying to merely historicise 'the Boston School of the late seventies' because so many of the artists had gone on to define themselves outside of that. And with the exception of Mark, whose Estate seemed very alive in some way, through Pat, all the other artists are still living and working. So it was really about not keeping it in the past. Like saying this is still relevant, this kind of artistic energy and artists riffing on one another, it could happen anywhere, any time or any place, if you're looking in that way. So definitely, the 'Boston School' project didn't feel like we were burying this 'underground' alive, as sometimes happens with museum exhibitions. It was still affecting people. The tragic part was that Mark's career had been cut so short, but it was through the other artists in the show that his work remains very present. I still try to work with the Estate today, because I feel like a lot more people should see that work.

PON: But how did you make the transition from Boston to New York?

LG: I'd been working at the ICA for about ten years by the time I left - starting as an intern, leaving as an associate curator. The third Director that I worked for, Milena Kalinovska, was resigning, and I decided that maybe I should go too. I was only about eighteen-years old when I started working there, so by age twenty-eight, I figured that I needed some practice applying for jobs. I had wanted to leave Boston, or it had occurred to me that I might want to, and I heard about this job at Thread Waxing Space. I honestly applied for the job as 'practice', I didn't expect to get the job. And then, very rapidly, very late in their search, they were just like, yeah... It was a curator post and Thread Waxing Space had never worked with an on-staff curator. Initially, its founder, Tim Nye, curated the shows and then many guest curators, like Christian Leigh, Joshua Dector, and sometimes members of the staff would curate projects. They had a music curator, as there was a period in which they did music a lot. Sam

Brumbaugh curated all the concerts. But they had never had someone on staff, and I think that they were hiring because they wanted someone to focus their curatorial identity, as it seemed quite disparate. What they perhaps wanted me to fix was what I thought was the most interesting thing about it. That was part of my impulse to refer back to some of the more noteworthy curatorial experiments that had happened there through my own curating, as well as the decision to continue to invite guest curators to do shows.

PON: So did a number of your shows look back to particular moments within the history of Thread Waxing Space?

LG: Yes, in particular 'Mr. Fascination' (1999) which, in my mind, was answering back to Christian Leigh's 'exploded movie' style of installation. I was really interested in what he had done, not because I thought it was successful or unsuccessful, but because he contributed a lot to this idea of the identity of the curator. I came to feel that it was a problematic idea - the curator as sole author - with artworks serving his articulation in this floor to ceiling barrage, and artists complaining that their work was getting kicked and damaged. There were obviously problems with his methodology, but he created a new model. I'd always rejected the idea of connoisseurship in curating, but this was something more complicated. For me, Leigh delineated two opposing strategies or goals: to assemble meaning, to articulate what the curator has to say, or to actually look at what's out there and try to make it understood. I don't want to be the hunter-gatherer curator where I'm going out to find things that fit my idea. I felt it was more interesting to look at what artists are doing, and then try to see if there were currents or trends or whatever you want to call it, ideas that artists shared. So it was that reversal of the task that guided me through a lot of my projects at Thread Waxing Space. However, probably the most well known exhibition I did there was something I inherited. It was a show with David Cronenberg, and that was all I was told when I took the

job.

PON: Did you have an opportunity to alter that in some way or participate and collaborate with Cronenberg on that?

LG: Cronenberg was not particularly involved. He was in the midst of production on *eXistenZ*, so I guess it was like 1998. I didn't even know if I was really into Cronenberg that much at the time. But I took a trip to Toronto and I spent three or four days in his archive, which he allowed. I got to view his student work and his early experimental films, which absolutely blew my mind. I got to start at the beginning and really understand his career as an artist, rather than rely on my cursory understanding of the director who had made *Crash* and *Naked Lunch*, which seemed like a very different phase in his career. The issues that seemed important in the early work were very close to current artistic practices, whether it was architecture or set design. The obvious thematic, bodily concerns were already passé in art - they had already been addressed. So I was happy to find there was something deeply important in Cronenberg's work that hadn't been discussed as much. So, 'Spectacular Optical' was my first show and definitely the most complicated one I did for Thread Waxing Space. It was also the one that seemed to garner the most critical reaction, which was really useful to certain artists early in their careers. There were also well known artists like Tony Oursler, Alexis Rockman, and Jane and Louise Wilson. I don't know if this was good or bad - your most flashy project being your first one in New York. I didn't really mean to do that. It was very accidental. But I was passionate about these connections. It was very synthesising in terms of the artists that I met who loaned me their books. Thanks to Jeremy, it was the first time I read Jeff Wall's writing and it was so clearly connected to the sort of architectural interests that Cronenberg was making films about in the late sixties - the horror and antiseptic grandeur of modern buildings.

PON: I mean you said that your trajectory into curating seems to have been accidental, but are there any particular historical paradigms or exhibitions, or curators or from the past or curatorial precursors that you return to?

LG: The exhibitions David Joselit curated for the ICA Boston, in the late eighties had a big impact on me. Maybe because they were in some ways very speculative - they were really doing things that didn't have a clear track record or audience. In retrospect, to see that they became signposts of certain kinds of work, which was unanticipated - that's always remained really important for me. I spent a lot of time going to see shows at MIT, but I always felt that the university art gallery setting produced certain audience relationships that were very isolated. Also, for Boston in general, the MFA definitely had important shows, the contemporary being curated by Trevor Fairbrother. For me, Gerhard Richter's 'October 18, 1977' exhibition, the Bader-Meinhof paintings, which came to the ICA (and was organised by the Grey Art Gallery) was a very altering experience, and my first experience of his work. It had a huge impact on me. As well as the show that I toured for a few years. I had no real curatorial involvement in 'American Art of the Late Eighties', which was put together by a curatorial team including David Ross, Elisabeth Sussman, and David Joselit. But again, that kind of huge group show that travelled all around the world through the support of the now obsolete 'USIA'. I mean, it's of such a different era, because the show had the feeling of a blockbuster show, even though it was the cutting edge of contemporary art. I feel like that moment is gone. Unless something is completely popular mainstream, it's never going to travel to several countries on the government's dime. When I look back to it now, I realise I was in this total plastic bubble when these things were possible, and, as well, the NEA supported in huge part the Situationist International exhibition, a historical show that was very important to me. It was very controversial of course; putting that kind of work in an institutional setting absolutely drew its dissident voices. I was still acting as an

assistant registrar at that point, and several of Jamie Reid's Sex Pistols collages were knifed in the gallery. It was kind of an intense time. So I guess those shows I saw when I was younger definitely were important, and later, seeing shows like 'Out Of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979' in Los Angeles at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and not seeing it come to New York, was a little bit strange. I just thought this was required viewing, like how could kids go to art school and not see that show? It would have saved them so much time. So there were periods where I travelled to Los Angeles a lot and saw museum shows there and felt that the East and West coasts were very separate. And there was a time where I would travel more to Europe, go to 'Documenta' and see the big international shows, but usually I would leave them with just one artist that I thought I might try to pursue. I was still working in Boston the year that 'Documenta', 'Sculpture Projects Münster', and the 'Venice Biennale' were all at the same time (1997). There was one artist, Sigalit Landau, whose work I saw in two of those shows, but it wasn't until the very last exhibition at Thread Waxing Space in 2001 that I finally worked with her. I'd basically been keeping in touch with her for all those years, so maybe that was one thing I learned, that it could take me many years to actually realise a project. I guess I could say most of the things that really inspired me were contemporary art shows. I didn't have a huge historical sense of where it all fits in, in the sense that I started at the most contemporary and went backwards once in a while. I have curated historical shows, for example, one of sixties utopian architecture, but that really came about because it seemed so relevant to contemporary artists, that was our reason for doing it. I definitely got a sense that the curators with whom I was working, early on, didn't have traditional educational experiences, like PhDs in Art History, although the reason David Joselit left the ICA was to pursue his PhD. So I watched him take this academic route, but he had already done all these really radical curatorial projects, and then decided he wanted to be an art historian. I was a little disillusioned by that at first, but

he went on to write an important book on Duchamp. And I feel like his shows back then are still very relevant.

PON: It seems interesting that in Julie Ault's book, *Alternative Art New York: 1965-1985*, it ends with Thread Waxing Space in the chronology of alternative spaces in New York, and in the introduction Julie suggests that there's not any alternative any longer because the idea of the alternative has changed ultimately and what is the alternative anymore?

LG: I'm working on a book that's called, *The Alternative To What? Thread Waxing Space and the '90s* and I'm sure that question has been used all over the place, but Thread Waxing Space once produced a postcard that said that. The book is about the history of Thread Waxing Space, alongside a general history of the nineties. It tries to put what we're calling a very transitional period in popular culture and in the culture of this institution side-by-side, to see how they overlap. Julie Ault and Martin Beck have contributed an essay to that book and they're also involved with Participant Inc. Going back to important shows, I met Julie when Group Material was still active, and they were invited to 'design' an exhibition at the ICA called 'Public Interventions'. I worked closely with her on that project, as well as Doug Ashford, and it was a formative experience for me. I learned so much from them in terms of exhibition strategies, and they really acted as co-curators in a sense. They weren't just exhibition designers, they made the show come together. Their practice of working with artists to make the show communicate the ideas that we were trying to communicate was very new to me. So that was certainly influential.

Julie's book also takes a very strong position on the past tense of the alternative space, and I think the only reason people still use the term is because we haven't come up with a new one. I see that period, from about 1990 on, as a period of reflection or searching for relevance. It's sort of the same thing I said about Tim Nye trying to describe to me what was criticised, or what

needed to be fixed with Thread Waxing Space. It was, perhaps, the very fact that Thread Waxing Space was trying to be The Kitchen, Artists' Space, and Art in General all in one, that perhaps, was really the reason it existed for so long in post-alternative space moment. Space is expensive, and the whole economic climate has changed. The availability of space and funding that fostered the alternative space movement became somewhat obsolete. Thread Waxing Space consistently focused on these soon-to-be-co-opted genres and categories – like Indie music, independent cinema, emerging art, all of these were being mainstreamed in that era, perhaps due to economic reasons. When we did the general timeline for the book, we saw in black and white that the internet happened in the nineties, and also Tim founded the first online music company, Sonic Net, and it just seemed like all these things evolved into mainstream culture and into the commercial sector very fast. So, of course, the whole nature of the alternative space was changing, too. Also, the political context and ramifications of this shift of 'alternativity', if you will, were unclear. This was very different from the reasons for alternative spaces coming to be in the seventies, they had a somewhat clear political mandate and knew why they were doing what they were doing, for example, showing what wasn't being shown, addressing issues that weren't being addressed. In the nineties, young artists were showing in galleries, performance was happening in clubs, it just seemed like the distinct clarity of purpose for alternative spaces wasn't there, and the function of those spaces was, in terms of serving artists and in terms of the curatorial field, a little bit ill-defined, which I don't think is a bad thing, I think it was just a cultural fact which demanded further consideration.

PON: But it seems there's a lot of the alternative spaces or artist run spaces, and not for profit spaces like White Columns etc., seem to have retained that mandate in a certain way, while Thread Waxing Space when you were there seemed to shift away from an association with what it had been doing. Do you think that its

raison d' être was ultimately this hybridised notion of itself, do you think that losing that hybridised notion of itself somehow made it into just another alternative space?

LG: I can only say what my gut instincts were at the time, or what my interests were. For me, it was the early, small, shifts or achievements that seemed really important. For example, we did an exhibition that was predominantly live screenings of a Super 8 filmmaker from Boston, Luther Price, who is very prolific — he' s been making films for many years. When his show was reviewed in *Artforum*, it was, of course, a complete coup, because although Luther is very well known in the rather small Super 8 world, his work was virtually unknown in the visual art world. So the fact that they put him in the art reviews section - the magazine really didn' t really have a place for him - it was just this great achievement. I felt, well, this is what we can do, we can get attention for an artist who is clearly deserving, who just doesn' t fit the traditional art setting, like a commercial gallery or museum, and maybe a place like Thread Waxing could be the right venue to actually show this artist in some depth. So, I became very interested in working with video artists and filmmakers, but also with visual artists who didn' t clearly fit into the commercial art sector, or really into the existing alternative space model because it wasn' t their first show. Thread Waxing Space worked mainly with unrepresented artists, however, without any age specificity to it, they didn' t have to be just starting out in their careers. So, for example, we did a video retrospective with Michel Auder, who had been making video, since the early seventies or sixties even, and this was a good place for him to show.

I also felt like the curatorial efforts of our alternative space colleagues seemed, too focused on the group show. While it was great for the artists to participate, it was usually with just one piece. Toward the end of my time at Thread Waxing Space, the depth of presentation seemed really much more important to an

artist than just an opportunity to be in a group show. It seemed like what artists really needed was someone to get really involved in their work and show something more substantial. I guess my opinion of our role changed. We did exhibitions with artists who seemed like rock stars in the countries where they lived, but had absolutely no venue in New York. I was looking at this self-proclaimed art centre, New York City, and saying, well, why doesn't the most important artist in Israel get to show in New York? We did a solo show with a well-known Norwegian artist who had no real opportunities in New York. I started to feel like New York was limited, and needed something a little different. I felt like it was totally fine, actually necessary, to re-define our role. Because it wasn't clear what we were supposed to do, we needed to figure out what's missing, what's not happening, and try to do that. There was no certainty that it was correct, it just felt like maybe New York needed to open up a bit. We also produced the exhibitions, so there was a great feeling of being able to contribute to the production of work that perhaps, most of the time, went in the dumpster at the end. It's not like I took great pleasure in throwing the shows away, but there were moments of a strong commercial market, the art world booming, that it just felt okay to do, have other values. I think that idea came right out of my early experiences at the ICA - the people who founded that museum in the thirties wrote manifestos about being an educational institution, that they'd never have a permanent collection because they didn't want to showcase the amassed wealth of individuals, it was all temporary. These were ideas that I read about in the basement of the ICA that would come back to me much later when I was trying to figure out what we were supposed to be doing.

PON: You've curated both monographic shows and obviously lots of group exhibitions, and since the late eighties there's been a rise in this idea of the curator as a creative component within the production, the mediation of the art as exhibition, or exhibition of artworks. I'm thinking particularly of the use of the term

'curating' for example, it's become a verb, and it suggests a certain activity, a certain pro-activity, and even more so the bastardized adjective 'curatorial' is primarily attached to group shows. There is a belief that the curator is now ultimately responsible for engaging within the production of the artwork, and the by-product of that is that the group exhibition happens to be the main work of the curator. If you're not curating group exhibitions you're not necessarily understood to be part of this creative component. Do you think that the group exhibition is the default button within contemporary curatorial practice?

LG: It's time that when you're not organising group exhibitions, people do not perceive you as a curator. It's true that I've had people tell me they really wish I were still 'curating'. It's true that people associate that kind of project, the group show, as the curator's statement or something. I've only realised recently, through programming Participant, that I view our seasonal programme of solo shows as a curatorial effort. While the field is becoming more academic, it's also becoming more clearly defined as an administrative role, which is a large part of my job as well as writing loan letters, budgets, grant applications. This kind of stuff is being taught more in programmes like NYU's arts administration programme, and certainly as part of the curriculum at the Center for Curatorial Studies and Columbia's programme. So there's this theoretical component, and then there's also this very practical part. But I see my main role, because I work mainly with living artists, as a collaboration with the artist. I certainly feel shy about interfering in the actual making of an artwork, but I do see myself as a facilitator in the production. Even with a modest solo show I'm engaged in making decisions and trying to clarify certain ideas that an artist is trying to express - not purely in educational terms, but involving communication. The task becomes how to make an artist's work more legible to a greater number of people.

PON: Would you say that you have predominantly worked with artists

or with artworks?

LG: I would definitely say I've worked with artists. And when you mention curators like Jan Höet or Hans Ulrich Obrist, you so often see the curator's name foregrounded, where the list of artists is less important somehow. I think that's changing with the current star system of artists, but even at Thread Waxing Space - and this might have been a place where I didn't succeed in terms of this particular definition of the curator - occasionally I would be asked why I wasn't mentioned. We were in a situation of fallout from curators like Christian Leigh, for example, in which reviews were about the curator, not about the artists. I definitely think it's due to my background that, for me, the most successful thing I could do is get the artist written about. I was really not interested in this celebrity curator idea, and I didn't want my projects to be viewed as purely what I had to say. I wanted it to be about what artists had to say. And my contribution would often be something like an essay written in *trans>arts.cultures.media* or elsewhere, or a catalogue essay, that would be the appropriate outlet for my perspective. I didn't feel my research necessarily belonged in a review, or in the foreground of the project. I felt like if I had done a good job curating an exhibition, the artist's work would be sufficient, my essay was optional for a visitor. I wanted the viewer to experience the artist's work first.

PON: You also appear to have a very methodical approach to your research into particular artists or into particular ideas when you're working on a project, and in some ways there is a kind of mediation and the production of a visibility of this meditation and research is part of the curatorial job somehow as well, and if that remains invisible are you doing your job? Those moments of collaboration and dialogue and discourse and interaction that you have leading up to the public presentation of a project or an exhibition is certainly a creative activity.

LG: Sure. I think the creative part for me definitely comes in. Of course, there is practical decision making, too. In one article I wrote about differing curatorial strategies, I tried to make an analogy with filmmaker John Cassavetes (who was the subject of an exhibition I later worked on). Because he worked so closely with his actors, there's often this misinterpretation that his films were improvised, when, in fact, almost none of them are. I was trying to say that this same misunderstanding occurs when people think a curator has great taste and intuition - like they just make these good decisions. I think this is a sort of danger - you don't want to be perceived as just improvising - it's actually a really, a carefully crafted thing. It's a fragile balance, but it's also one in which all this work goes into making it look like it wasn't really that much work.

PON: But what influence did your thinking around Cassavetes' approach have on your own work?

LG: Well, his films (and their initial reception) definitely provided a context for thinking about the historical positioning of emotion as a topic for art. There was an article by David Deitcher, which was called 'Sense and Sentimentality', (published in *Parkett*) that addressed the reception of Felix Gonzales-Torres and Ross Bleckner's retrospectives at the Guggenheim. He wrote about the situation, since modernism, in which ideas about sentimentality and emotion have been relegated to inferior status, as kitsch or not serious art matters. This really inspired me, in tandem with looking at the methodology of Cassavetes. It put these other themes into focus, and the inherent problems involved when you're trying to address certain wayward emotional matters, all of a sudden you feel like it's not considered an intellectual pursuit anymore. And what I didn't know when I started doing this research was that Cassavetes was very clear in his interviews and in his own writing about his practice. He's absolutely clear about the fact that his work is art and why he has a very particular understanding of what it means to be an artist. This really

helped me to focus on trying to put a show together that, both thematically and formally, dealt with this problem. If you're dealing with certain topics, you have to go a lot further, formally, to make people take it seriously. I thought that the problems that David Deitcher had outlined were still in play, and that certain kinds of art weren't considered valid enough. So I worked on an exhibition that came out of this article on Cassavetes. Honestly, it wasn't a very successful show in traditional terms, a lot of people didn't see the show, it wasn't reviewed, but for me it was extremely important. There were certain artists who had previously been in a lot of exhibitions about more obvious popular trends and felt boxed in by them. So, for an artist to say they really related to the idea of the show was great. And with Ellen Cantor, for example, we really tried to address a more physical problem at the time, that is, showing video works in an open exhibition plan. Her projection was huge, but it was installed in close proximity to paintings and drawings. It worked for some reason, and the artist was really happy to have her work presented in this way, more in a kind of ensemble, not in this separate area. So there were little things that worked, but it didn't have that same kind of response that, for whatever reason, the Cronenberg project did. It was a lot less flashy, I guess.

PON: And with the Cronenberg project, was it much more black box in terms of how you designed the show?

LG: We tried to integrate some of the video, but definitely the exhibition space got increasingly dark as you went through it, and the final piece by Jane and Louise Wilson was in a very dark space. The show ended with this very loud, dark, scary piece. It kind of worked.

PON: So how did you come to set up Participant Inc?

LG: Well, there's a lot of work and of soul searching that goes

into closing down a place like this. We had been through all kinds of strategic planning and trying to figure out what to do prior to closing. We had to go through all these facilitated meetings to address questions like: Why are you here? What is your purpose? Where should you be? So all these big questions were still floating around in my head, even though the decision to close Thread Waxing Space was eventually made. I left Thread Waxing Space feeling like there was still a really big need for a space that, for lack of a better term, I would call it an artist-driven curatorial platform, or a place that would help artists produce new work, or would show work that was uncharacteristic of what was being promoted by the commercial sector and museums. I felt like there were all these things that needed to be done, and they weren't happening in New York. So I basically started to think about founding a new space as I was doing the shut down operations at Thread Waxing, which of course was really sad. But it also got me in touch with the archive of Thread Waxing Space while I was packing it up, and it was very inspiring. In the same way that we talked about the evolution of Thread Waxing Space and the fluid way it began — it's founders didn't really know if it was going to be a commercial gallery or an alternative space - it didn't really matter. When Tim Nye started it, he was in the Whitney ISP and he decided to do a show. So he rented a space and did a show, and then his friends were like, why don't you do another show? They didn't set out to be a certain thing. It just sort of evolved over time. Perhaps with Participant, I had certain historical references, such as Julie Ault's book (and I'd seen the show that inspired this book at The Drawing Center which was then called 'Cultural Economies'). I knew this was a certain history, but I was interested in how to create a space that embodies these ideologies in a different New York. I really didn't have an answer, but I knew there were certain things that artists wanted, or needed, that I wanted to keep exploring. And certainly the physical space we found was the most obvious thing that dictated our primary format, one-person shows. But I'm very interested in experimenting with other formats. I think Rita Ackermann and

Lizzie Bougatsos' show demonstrated that you don't need a huge amount of space to make a dynamic exhibition. Not that I fully understood this as it was happening, but I've come to really appreciate what they did curatorially, because they did it so aggressively. While it's easy to describe Participant's programme in words such as interdisciplinary and inter-generational, these artists/curators actually manifested these ideas through their actions. It was so literal, placing artists who had shown maybe only a couple of times with hugely well-known artists, levelling certain hierarchies of career status, age, etc. That was totally exciting for me - that these things that I talk about in terms of our mission could be re-delivered by these artists as a tangible working methodology. So you know I definitely thank them.

PON: So how would you situate what Participant does in relation to other spaces or other activities in New York?

LG: I think of the majority of our not-for-profit colleagues in New York as grown-ups. I look to them because they have longevity. The surviving original alternative spaces like Art In General, White Columns, Artists' Space, have stood the test of time, they've grown up a little bit. I've worked in the field for a while, but mostly as a curator, not as the director of anything, so there's a lot that I'm figuring out as we go along. We know how to curate and install a show, but we don't have a huge safety net in terms of our operations. So that necessitates a high level of collaboration with artists. Most artists are happy to show with us, which, in my opinion, is like going pretty far out on a limb with us. Although we dedicate all of our resources and time to the shows, we're all volunteers and there's not a big budget. There's not much of an infrastructure, and only four people work here at any given time. There's not the kind of staff and financial support that the more adult spaces have. Because we've gotten really nice press attention since we first started, I've always told artists we do have the potential to be very high profile, however low budget. For this reason, it feels like a

discovery for people when they come here, they can sense it's not one hundred per cent institutionalised yet. I don't know if that's a budgetary thing or if it's part of our curatorial style, but it feels different, there is some sort of risk. The way that I learn about the programme has actually been the few opportunities that we've had to participate in group projects. For example, we did an exhibition exchange with this artist-run space in Holland, and we did a booth at an art fair - these were unexpected opportunities to take a season of solo shows and make them into a group show. It's been these experiences that feel like dumping our hard drive out on the floor, when I see how things do fit together. These opportunities have been kind of telling, when I realise what we do looks different than what commercial galleries do. Maybe because at times it's more ephemeral, or because it's more content-driven in some ways, and less object-oriented. I don't feel that comfortable reading the moment too shortly after it's happened, but people do try to define how they are different. I mean certainly the 'Whitney Biennial' has dealt with the issue of generational lineage and has tried to span generations in some way, but I feel like we articulate that more unselfconsciously and over time. The connections between our projects exist more as a back-story at first. For example, Lizzie and Rita's group show and Lutz Bacher's solo show have certain people and ideas in common. Working with Lutz had a very long history that spanned many relationships between us. Her project had so much to do with Colin de Land, as well as her long working relationship with Pat Hearn, so it also brought me back to ideas I had invested in 'Boston School'. I was thinking again about how these families come together, crossing generations, and I wouldn't have the relationship I had with Lutz if it weren't for doing that show ten years prior. And I wouldn't have done the show with Lizzie if it weren't for my relationship with Lutz. So this is all like back-story to a certain degree, but it's also about these sorts of personal genealogies. I always think of Pat Hearn, although she was an art dealer, as someone who was really invested in education. There are these great videos of her giving tours in her

gallery, for example one of her explaining Lutz's *Playboy* paintings, I think it was on cable access TV. It probably wasn't an accident that there was some kind of draw to that for me. I really saw her as a mentor because she was an unusual art dealer. And I see myself as kind of an unusual alternative space director; in fact, I find it weird to use that term because I would love to have a boss again. I miss the amount of time I got to spend as a curator. But I do see that a non-hierarchical sort of set-up enables me to do that, and also totally harkens back to the whole seventies model of the alternative space - there wasn't a lot of delineation in terms of positions and departments, it was a very collaborative environment that I think happens here with artists.

PON: The book that you're working on at the moment, *The Alternative to What? Thread Waxing Space and the '90s*, is it an attempt to somehow situate the history of Thread Waxing Space into the wider history of alternative spaces? And also, I mean the second part of the question is how would Participant somehow fit into history?

LG: Well, I think the book tries to situate Thread Waxing Space in a more general cultural history of the '90s, in which many aspects of alternative and independent culture started entering the mainstream. It's more about the conditions that dramatically altered the perception of alternative music, independent film, and, of course, alternative arts presenting, and how Thread Waxing Space functioned in relation to a culture that was rapidly absorbing its fringes. The book includes a general timeline that traces the culture wars, AIDS, DNA, new media, all these things that were kind of touchstones of the nineties. We're looking at what we did as a space to see where our attempts to reflect the cultural moment, which was part of our mission, might have overlapped. It's really not about the alternative space per se, it's more about alternative culture and how it completely changed in that era. I guess it's no coincidence that several authors mention Nirvana's *Nevermind*, there are certain things that just

come up again and again because they signal a big shift in what was perhaps considered independent, alternative, underground….

Regarding how Participant fits in, I always thought that the book, rather than being purely historical, has sort of an orientation towards the future. The book frames a discussion about this highly transitional era as perhaps a platform for re-thinking the idea of 'alternativity'. It's very speculative and authors don't directly address this as a topic, but it's interesting to look at how things synched up. It's not like anyone was particularly clairvoyant about it, but Tim Nye did have a tendency to engage with certain things right before they became popularised or introduced to the mainstream. So maybe that was just a time of rapid change. But I think it was looking toward the future, and I would like to think that Participant fits into that arena, we can't really say for sure that what we're doing today is going to be important any time in the future, but we have a sense that there is a tradition that's being carried out, but we're not stuck in that. We're willing to re-define it if it seems to be the appropriate thing to do, so we have one foot in the past, and one foot in the future, I guess.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

LIAM GILLICK

New York, 03-05-04

PAUL O'NEILL: You studied at Goldsmiths with people associated with yBa like Damian Hirst et al, but your practice seems to come out of a relationship with American conceptual art discourse and in the nineties your practice was more visible and certainly more evidently part of a critical discourse around art and its exhibitionary context in Northern Europe, much more than in Britain at the time, but can we start with looking back at your relationship with the art scene in London in the late eighties and early nineties and how you remember the so-called DIY exhibitions like 'Freeze' or artist-run spaces like City Racing? It would also be interesting to talk about the relationship between curating and art making as an ongoing critical component within your practice.

LIAM GILLICK: Exhibitions like 'Freeze' and 'Modern Medicine' were put together in the interests of people who had no interest in their being an intellectual discourse around art and it was quite clear even at the time to people that that was taking place. There was a desire from certain artists to bypass any critical systems in order to get straight to the people with money. You could argue that there could be a level of intuitive critique within that, a critique of a kind of lazy system, a bit like an equivalent to the way the Austrian situation politically became very complicated and contradictory, partly because of a perceived failure by the Social Democrats, who had been in power for so long, as a kind of leftist party, but had failed to retain contact with anything radical and interesting in any way, and they were kind of punished by a right-swing, as a protest. You could argue that some echoes of that system during that time and in that situation. The thing is I'd always been more interested in a legacy of the critical thinking around conceptual art, where you could argue that there had been a definite merger of moments of authorship, especially if you didn't know what you were talking about or hadn't really thoroughly researched it. I mean I had read through '*Six Years...*' by Lucy Lippard when I was at art school and read most of the back issues of *Artforum* towards my final essay as a way of researching what had happened. I was very conscious that the idea of dynamic, interesting interface between artistic production and the context around art seemed to be something from the past was now limited to serious intellectual endeavour outside Britain, or something that had already taken place and was no longer possible and no longer relevant, but it is very hard to remember how boring most of the structures seemed to be in London in the mid to late eighties. Things that had started with a radical intent of

inclusiveness had become neo-conservative and in the same way you could argue say Terry Atkinson's return to painting had a strangely neo-conservative aspect to it. The very inclusiveness of ad-hoc alternative spaces and so on, rendered them, I always felt, not mobile or agile enough to really take on the genius of the bourgeois world, to kind of absorb and take over things, so the alternative for me was models from outside Britain. What's interesting though is because I come from London, from that piratical, ironic culture I also dealt with those things with a degree of scepticism, so if I went to Cologne and someone was developing an exhibition about the notion of the political subconscious, or something, in that case I would still deal with it with a certain degree of scepticism. I would think, well, all that that's doing is presenting an idea of alternativeness and wilful marginalisation that again is not quite agile or mobile enough although it seems to have sustained the dynamic of art as a relevant social practice, it also equally seems too wilfully marginalised. For my own work what happened is, I sort of decided to side step the question and not really get involved initially with any of this idea of people confusing you as the idea of doing something that was clearly curated as a kind of gesture and it starts to happen about '92 where I organised a show ironically in a private gallery, Gio Marconi Gallery in Milan and the initial invitation was really a way of avoiding doing an exhibition on one level. It was complicating certain questions of authorship and the idea of the show was how to test the assumption, already in evidence at that point, that people were using this term 'conceptual' to refer to any art that was being produced in Britain at the time that wasn't painting. So I used the old model of doing an instruction show. The show was called 'Instructions', but it had another title in Italian, which was called 'The Mystery of the 100 Dollar bill', which was just a completely, it just meant that Italians approached the show in a totally different way to Anglo Saxons and I invited a number of younger artists that I knew from Britain at the time, many of whom weren't really known at the time, like Gillian Wearing or Jeremy Deller or Giorgio Sadotti and so on, to give me an instruction that I could carry out in the gallery on their behalf. Now of course, this kind of model, of taking on something that has already been done and already well known is sort of exhausted now from being confronted by exhibition structures that seem to have already been done, but in fact that was definitely part of a testing process that was very self-conscious about re-testing something that you knew had already been done relatively recently (in the previous twenty

years), but doing it again to see what the new conditions would produce and what the new situations it would provide, and the most profound discovery from doing it was the absence of the artists was the crucial element, that their work often didn't really sustain any conceptual terms as we would understand them, because so many of the instructions involved doing things were like printing a photograph for someone or building something for someone. It became purely an exercise in carrying out, or making someone's artwork, which isn't particularly profound. What was missing was that nuance or presence of the artist. So subsequently after that, I think every single thing I did involved some kind of discourse or some kind of presence. It involved some kind of absolute condition that the artist must be there if possible.

PON: Why was that your solution, what was your reasoning?

LG: I think that I realised from the perspective that the aspect that I found at that point, while already Le Magasin in Grenoble had already been running for a few years and the Whitney had already been producing people for a few years, although not in quite the same way as the new European curator schools, there was certain institutional pressures that weren't being addressed quite so effectively by that curatorial process - in the sense of the process of trying to examine the question of curating. One of the clear ones was that in order to assert a degree of control over circumstances the potential chaos of having the authors or the artists around a lot would cause far too many potential, not exactly problems, but it's a bit like positive discrimination. There is a certain moment where it might be useful for the artist to absent themselves from the situation in order to allow another kind of discussion to have a higher temperature or a higher tone in the mix, and I felt that the subsequent projects I was involved in were somewhat more reduced in terms of their formal presence, but the presence of the artist with a kind minder of interface as it were, could have a more important role. Now, that insistence that the artist be there wasn't actually followed by people, so the fact that I might have asked for it or demanded it didn't mean it necessarily happened, but I was interested in challenging that question, say for example the project I did in Tours at the CCC in '95 that was called 'Stoppage', somewhat referencing the Duchamp idea of the stoppage, which was involved in inviting a number of artists to think of an endless soundtrack for the city. Beyond the reasons why I did that, my request that all the artists

be invited created a problem because in terms of the institution, the role of the artist as a curator or the artist working within the institution was a) a cheap way to do something and b) the argument would often be, well seeing as they don't actually have to do anything, why would we invite them. This was something I came across a lot when I was first working. This idea of well if you've got nothing to do how can you even justify being here. So a lot of my discussion was about whether or not we really…at what moment do we require…in fact it is quite useful to have people around, but a lot of possibly, to talk and to think things through. So you could say on a certain organisational level a lot of it was to do with the question of the presence or absence of the artist during the moment of exhibition and also the question of what is seen to be relevant or useful work at the moment of exhibition in relation to the institution. These were the kind of things that I was very interested in.

PON: One of the elements that you seem to be distinguishing is between the curatorial projects that you were involved during that period and the curated exhibitions that were happening in London in the late eighties-early nineties and the focus on a discourse around the mechanics of production and the mediation of art instead of a thin thematic narrative where works are used to illustrate a particular spurious idea or sensibility.

LG: Yes and no. I mean the two really clear, important, crucial things to me were an exhibition called 'Les Ateliers du Paradise', which was at Air de Paris in 1990, and that had been curated by people who ran the gallery who had actually done the curating course in Grenoble and everyone I worked with very early on and often still work with had somehow been through that Grenoble course but they hadn't decided to work within an institutional frame. They thought that the question of what is an exhibition could also be examined more rapidly and more quickly through the idea of a private gallery, so Florence Bonnefous or Edouard Merino and also Esther Schipper and Louise Neri who ended up working at *Parkett* and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster had all done the first years of the Grenoble curating course. The implication that doing a curating course could lead you towards a didactic or clearly authored exhibition structure wasn't the case at all. They were interested structurally in how can you make an exhibition, how long should you spend with work, what kind of structure should it be? And a kind of strangely tense relationship with the idea

that artists are right or artists usually have the right idea, or know what to do, or should be looked after because there was always a critical relationship. They didn't come with a passive relationship to the idea of what the artist would do or could produce. So for example that show in 1990, which I guess is contemporary with things like 'East Country Yard', and I think 'Gambler' and 'Modern Medicine' were around 1990 as well. A group of artists were asked for all the things they would need to have a perfect kind of holiday, studio, free time, free association in time in Nice during one summer and the galleries' role was as co-conspirators but also as, almost like, almost showing up to the institutions in that area how fast you could do things, how little resources you needed to do things and how you could problematise the role of the mediator alongside the artist without becoming a slave to the artist, yet also without becoming super-didactic as well about telling people what it is supposed to be. It was very hard with that show how to tell who was who, who was the gallery, who were the artists, who were the curators? The other show that was very important was an exhibition called 'No Man's Time', which was at the Villa Arson, I think in 1991. That was kind of an interesting conceit. It was an exhibition done by Nicolas Bourriaud and Eric Troncy and probably one of the last times they worked together. It was really an exhibition about time and so was 'Les Ateliers du Paradise', and this was the thing that I picked up in France, this idea of taking some legacy from cinema theory and from contemporary French post-doctoral theory in an activated way, so a lot of the questions were not like using post-structural theory as a reflective way to generate the content for art. It was like, the exhibition is called 'No Man's Time', in a way that you might have 'no man's land', and it would be a structure where you would think about whether the exhibition is a documentary or a fiction, how long you should spend addressing questions of time without using time specific medium, but also again it had this thing where it brought all the artists together even though there would be potential tensions between them. France at that point became an incredible meeting place for people. It was where you met people because that is one of the functions of the institutional set-up. So Allen Ruppersberg was around, as well as Karen Kilimnik as well as Philippe Parreno as well as Felix Gonzalez-Torres or Henry Bond and myself. It felt both very different from the idea of an artist's organised exhibition that was self-serving and something connected to the market and bypassing the slowness of the way things are, but also very different from some other kind of exhibition about some formalist aspect of the work. In

a strange way it presented a kind of rather cloudy and out of focus conceit and everything else could kind of swoop around it. These things were very important and they brought up for me the possibility that the kind of artists you could deal with and work with were not…you were obliged to offer them a decent conceit and you could trust the artist to address the conceit rather than coming up with or trying to match the work to the idea or the idea to the work. In a way the work stands on one side and the artist used the exhibition moment to think in a semi-autonomous space of ideas, which is not derived from the work or leads towards the work, it sort of works strangely in parallel to the idea of the art. The next exhibition, important exhibition I was in was 'Backstage' in '93 at the Kunstverein in Hamburg, and that was really back to this idea of like, 'Backstage' was the opening exhibition of the renovated Kunstverein in Hamburg and the idea was what it says. They would open up the backstage and the exhibition would appear to occupy and infiltrate both the front of house and back of house of the institution. That was a deeply hollow experience in a strange way after these early projects in France because it seemed to be so limiting in terms of the potential interpretations of the work and the institution that could be derived from it. Of course it generated quite a sophisticated discourse because the discourse in Germany is quite sophisticated and the people organising were quite sophisticated but as an experience for the artist and an experience for the curator, and I think I can speak a little bit for Barbara Steiner about this, it was essentially frustrating due to the fact that it was neither perversely limited nor truly parallel. It was sort of somewhere between the two. So it wasn't like 'can you make an endless soundtrack for a city', as a kind of new task for an artist nor was it limiting in that way, like task orientated, nor was is completely blown out like 'No Man's Time'. It was somewhere in between. It was like 'Backstage', so visitors to the exhibition would tend to look at the work in the exhibition and try to read in a potential cross-reading towards the idea of backstage and these things definitely affected me and a lot of things I would do in a neo-curatorial way were reactive to the structures I was involved in as an artist and the experiences I would have as an artist. Sometimes I'd make things relatively easy for the artist like the Tours project, which also went to Nice later, or I would try to develop a different sense of how to pass time for the artists in other projects such as 'The Moral Maze' at Le Consortium in Dijon in '95-96, where the whole question of the occupation of the institution and the passage of time and ideas and information and

who gets the information and how it is passed around were definitely at the centre of the project. The artists were both the audience and the producer and the distracters of things in that project. With that show, we made the space of the institution ambiguous by using that kind of white wash on the windows so it seemed like it was under renovation. We never really publicised whether it was open or closed. We left it in a state of ambiguity and during the week that most of us were all there, which was Lothar Hempel, Carsten Höller, Rirkrit Tiravanija, Maurizio Cattelan, myself and maybe Dominique was there for a while, we invited a sequence of middleground specialists; people that don't produce initial ideas but process information, to visit us one by one during the week and be looked after and fed and be paid lots of money and be asked questions that week, and in the gaps between people being there some of the artists would sort of make kinds of artwork, which of course would be effected by the thinking and the talking throughout the week. It definitely functioned as the artist as the interrogator rather than the interrogated and it turned that role, but it was also based on the premise that what you do to an artist during an institutional restructuring changes art, because if we didn't write anything down or record or document anything but the idea was that we would be inherently different afterwards because if we sit there for a week and spend eight hours asking questions to a political strategist on one, asking questions to someone who takes the ideas for advertising and tries to make them real, or someone who works on economic systems for education within developing countries and we sit and ask many questions that would sustain the discussion, we will always be different after that.

PON: You mean the exhibition in this case is ultimately like the manifestation of a discursive space that is ready, happened, and already happening elsewhere, but by folding different discourses onto each other it becomes an infected space for a potentially new discursive space where art could play a intervening role.

LG: Absolutely, but rather than put it into play as the idea of a free non-specific idea of discussion or to show evidence that there can be discussion as it were, we actually tried to functionalise the place and make it an actual one, where we could actually find out something and do something and yet the things left behind didn't necessarily follow the criteria that you would require normally, whatever that means, to

demonstrate that this had taken place as it were. Of course, the tension it created between us and the institution, however open and liberal the institution might be, were quite precise in a sense that Le Consortium in Dijon is run by people who are very affected by a post '68 position. They had worked early with people like Michael Asher, Daniel Buren, Niele Toroni, Olivier Mosset, John Armleder and other artists who we'd always been told had overtly questioned the role of the institution, by like putting the radiators in the hallway or something. While we'd found that incredibly interesting and inspiring we needed to find another way to do things and maybe the obligation that we had was to use the exhibition moment as an enlightening tool for artists as well as these notions of the public, to view artists as equally obliged to use the moment of exhibition as a time to enlighten themselves as it were, or to question their own motives as it would be enlightening or inviting the multiple publics to do the same, and that's a very important aspect of all of those projects. You will notice that most of the things that I have organised as a curator, as it were, have had this idealistic aspect, where it is either trying to correct a sense where you feel that the artists are lacking in pressure or push to question themselves and their own role within things or where the notion of the artist's presence and critical presence has been otherwise repressed. For example, Maurizio Cattelan was like the magpie and the cuckoo in the situation. There was no particular interest from my part in inviting him. There was pressure from the institution on a misreading moment purely based on similar age and having been in similar shows that we should of invite him, so as a form of directed punishment and exposure we did invite him. He just caused trouble. It was very hard to justify. He didn't really produce anything or do anything. He just caused trouble and hung around. This was very interesting and hard. This was not a situation that was possible in the Kunstverein in Hamburg or in Nice at the Villa Arson for example, in these more established and more apparently responsible spaces they weren't in a position to do this. It is when the artist becomes the curator that the artist can say OK let's invite him and he can just hang around and if he is annoying he can go home.

PON: Was that a productive experience?

LG: Not particularly, it suggested to me that I probably don't have very much in common with Maurizio and I have a different sense of what's what. Often those potential engagements are repressed by the way things are. I

have just been editing a text from a conference in Munich recently, *Curating Light Luggage*, and one of the projects it refers to is Andrea Fraser's project from '93 in the Kunstverein, *The Society of Taste*. Her project was to interview the nine members of the board at the Kunstverein and she asked them questions of what they felt art was for or what the Kunstverein was for and all these usual questions that seemed to be fairly rhetorical to me, but they are always worth asking. One of the interesting things that she found out was that hardly anyone talked about the idea of the public at all and when you do work with an institution on some level it's really true that the thing that makes it difficult to say let's invite Maurizio and he can just hang around is that normally there is some moment where people say well it's not like we owe it to the public to not do that. It's more like we owe it to the people who are the shadow behind the structure to not do that. It's very, very rare that you get a situation where it is because the public won't like it or the multiple publics won't like it. It is usually for another reason. I think one of the things that happens when you are notionally the artist doing these structural projects and because people are more used to the idea of a cultural memory or a cultural fantasy about artists' permission to be involved in moments of refusal is that they allow those moments of refusal to enter into the curatorial realm for a minute. Someone who views themselves as an entirely professionalised curator like Barbara Steiner says as part of her project: let's invite Maurizio and he can come and hang around, but he can't touch anything. It is much more difficult for her to do that. The same thing coming from me might seem titillating or even exciting or artistic. I was very interested in exposing some of those moments for people to register the subtle differences between these structures and although it was not the primary point behind these projects they have often been inherent within the project. Take the show 'What If: Art of the verge of art and architecture'. One of the main things that I did was to make the exhibition non-democratic in terms of space because there is usually an assumption, possibly quite correctly for historical reasons, that one should be somewhat democratic in terms of the distribution of space to artists within an institution and if not, only when it is entirely appropriate to what the work requires: a) you try to be equal and b) you try to be appropriate to the work. I was in a position because I am an artist to have one of these soft moments of refusal as a kind of device so I could say Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster only asked to have a little monitor and a tiny bit of green carpet, let's give her a

sixth of the whole space - you know, an enormous quantity of green carpet, more than she asked for and let's cram other things together in the way that they didn't ask for and play with some of the hierarchies like that, use Rirkrit's house to display work by someone else and do these things, which seem on a daily basis like so what and they may only seem formal or like the organisation of space but they are also about the organisation of hierarchies and the organisation of structures. They are very difficult to do often within the constant sort of settling feeling that you get with the institution. It tends towards the stop, stop, and stop, rather than the start, start, start, just by the nature of it. It can be superficially open and all these people are very good to work with, but just because the way things are and because of the nature of collective cultural memory they tend towards you can do what you want and then stop, stop, stop - like stop there. They want to find moments of arrest within the structure and it can be quite useful for the artist to function within that framework to question these moments of arrest, question these moments of clarification because that is what they are really about. They are about choosing the moment where one might encourage a broader public to come and say this is what this person proposes and keeping things in a state of movement or shimmer in those situations for the person who is the curator as it were.

PON: Do you think that those creative, curatorial relationships are so significantly different within institutional structures whether it is an artist or the curator if both are coming from an independent position or from outside of the institution?

LG: It is very rare that an independent curator is given the opportunity to do such a big show in a large institution or a big museum. It has been a constant dilemma for people of my generation who are working more as critics or curators than they are as artists. It's a big question. On one level they don't want to be involved in the big institutions and museums and I can understand that but on another level without them some of these questions wont proceed. With Maria Lind for example in the Moderna Museet, she is forced into what you could call a competitive discourse a bit like the art pages of a newspaper, where you have to justify and apply for what you are going to do. You have to say that in a couple of years time I would like to do a big exhibition about this or that and you have to argue you have to argue for what resources you need and you have fight for

them. It just means that you have to get involved in a process of explanation, application, and all these things. I am astonished how much time people have to spend justifying their activity and that is an extraordinary thing because I don't. Whereas historically, I think the idea of the artist, the artist had to get involved much more in explaining themselves, even if to explain themselves is I refuse to explain myself and that is my position. It's very odd at the moment that the artist is incredibly protected by this moment where the curator, whether they choose to work in an institution or not, is encouraged and pressured to constantly explain themselves and constantly justify their activity. So even if Maria didn't want to set up a structure for the show at the Moderna Museet, she had to at some point argue for it and explain why she wanted to do it. I was never asked to explain why I wanted to do anything frankly, beyond my own interest in discussing ideas. The second phase of this kind of curatorial process has been my role as conspirator with curators, often within a larger institution, where I can stand alongside them and we can work together in order to achieve things that one or the other of us alone can't achieve. I can take either the role of the rogue individual as represented by the notion of the artist and people don't want to seem small minded in front of an artist. Do you see what I mean? But also of course, the curator can often be the voice carrying the ideas of the artist who are not part of that construction of the personality that has to do with the rogue individual. Of course there are very practical, pragmatic, informative, context orientated things that I am very interested in and when I say them I sound very petty and small-minded in the role of the artist, but in the role of the curator it sounds perfectly fine. Ironically a lot of the daily work that you would think of as being the dull, bread and butter work of the curator, was actually carried out by me on that project because I actually enjoy doing it, but we were very careful to make sure it appeared to be coming from Maria.

PON: Were you involved in the selection of the works on any level?

LG: For that show, we decided I didn't want to be involved because having dealt with the Maurizio question earlier on, I didn't want to get involved in...I believe in the potential of a curatorial structure that can include and accept certain work that an artist who is trying to find space in society to work and find their own place might not find so easy to deal with. The idea that artists are inherently generous and friendly towards

one another and open to the international community of artists is of course not entirely the case and of course there would be people involved in an exhibition like that I wouldn't put into an exhibition, but from an institutional perspective or from an art historical perspective there would be an interesting reason to put them in and I didn't want get involved in that thing of arguing why someone should be in it.

PON: You mentioned a number of artists who were involved in institutional critique in the seventies and eighties, and there is an argument to suggest that your work and the work of artists of your generation such as Rirkrit Tiravanija are producing a discourse, which is an extension of that critique with a key difference being that the myth around the earlier version of institutional critique was that they were working against the institution, whilst I would say that your work is working from within the institutional framework and with these structures themselves and acknowledging that working with that infrastructure can be productive.

LG: But because we are talking about a period from '87 onwards, the reason is because curating changed. It is not that art changed, it is because curating changed. What happened was… I mean, I was showing in Esther Schipper's gallery in Cologne that felt directly, not against or in competition with, but certainly in tension with Christian Nagel Gallery, and whereas Esther Schipper, that became Schipper and Kromer, was showing Pierre Joseph, Philippe Parreno, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, Angela Bullock, myself, had moments with Felix Gonzalez-Torres, Sean Landers in his very early work that was completely abject in a way, Peter Fend and General Idea etc. This strange group of people where some of the DNA from classic critical theory is missing in their work as it were. It would be either they are slightly mad or they are really interested in cinema or they won't explain themselves or they are interested in weird theory. Whereas, Nagel was showing Andrea Fraser, Mark Dion and so on. For me it was much more of an American perspective. It was a feeling that they were dealing with the idea of fixed hierarchies that you can't do anything about. It was almost as if they were implying that they were somewhat timeless and without them their work wouldn't exist and Michael Asher actually said that to me, who is one of their very important people as a precursor. During this conference in Madrid in February, he actually said that if the museum doesn't exist than my work becomes irrelevant. It was a strange statement. I said, do you really mean that. It becomes a bit like

the person who when the conflict is over their entire existence has been justified by the conflict and they have no way to function without it. It seemed to me that the developments within curatorial discourse were moving much too quickly to allow you to remain in the position of saying I will just interview the people who are the members and the directors of the Kunstverein and find out their ideas about the way things are because it's like, well no shit, they happen to be a group of enlightened bourgeoisie. I know what they think. I think the gallery I was involved in felt that certain of these questions, the answers weren't in danger of changing rapidly but the way these things are was that we were in a position to think that because of the work done by the other people. I think that the work we were doing sometime influenced in return some of the work that they were doing. So some of Renée Green's work, I think was definitely effected by some of the work that was happening around Esther's gallery. I was in a very different position to these people, because a lot of the artists that Esther was showing were either dyslexic, dysfunctional Americans, literally in the case of Sean Landers or metaphorically in the case of someone like Peter Fend, where there was no real transparency in his work. It was about conspiracy in a way. I come from a different cultural background so I always had a strong interest in this whole question of this context orientated work around Christian Nagel and you could suggest that a lot of the projects that I have been involved in have a similar kind of earnest aspect to them, at least structurally, but the execution of them and the way it then gets laid out as a exhibition structure is very influenced by the question of the exhibition as a place that was developed around some of the artists showing in France. So I didn't have the same belief that these people had in fact that if you have transparency within the work or the exhibition structure somehow that would be alright because coming from Britain where part of Britain's great pirate tradition has been around the myth of transparency, as far as I was concerned, and that wasn't going to ameliorate anything. I don't believe you can have transparency in that way. I was interested in Derrida and there is nothing about transparency in that. You could say that they were more interested in Pierre Bourdieu and that was the discussion about the cultural sphere and the corporate sphere and you made this transparent etc. This is OK, but I was more interested in what you could call the psychology of economy or these other questions. If you want to change something and you give people all the tools to understand what you have done, it is a bit tricky because my experience of dynamic groupings has

always been sometimes they have to hide, they sometimes have to veil themselves, they sometimes have to not be apparent and not transparent because it is all very easy for a privileged, white, middle class person from London to say it is good for everyone to be transparent but what if you are doing something that you are not supposed to be doing or that the culture doesn't want you to be doing so the last thing you want to be is transparent. This was my main critique of that structure that it laid things bare for people who wanted to stop it, to stop it and also to represent things to you that you already knew like a form of dog art, where the culture throws something away or disseminates something and the artist just comes along and reflects it back again. Of course, I liked the work and I thought it was important and interesting and more interesting than anything going on in London quite frankly, but it still had that twinge of like that irony. Like you are telling me that things are really bad because of this…you don't say.

PON: The whole discourse around visibility politics in the nineties shifted away from the idea that transparent representation was necessarily a productive force for a potentially more radical culture because obviously those mechanisms can be used to make transparent certain forms of representation that can be adopted from both either side of the political sphere and much of the transparency is related to the idea that there is something mysterious that needs to be uncovered in the first place. Visibility became more of a question of whose visibility and for whom, rather than what degree of transparency and within any spectacular culture power lies with the observer not with the seen and with the producer not the consumer of that visibility, regardless of how transparent it may be. So for example, transparency within curatorial projects also produces a greater visibility for the curator, which is not necessarily a bad thing but it doesn't necessarily produce a greater degree of criticality.

LG: But, one of the things if you call it a loose group such as John Miller and Josef Strau, even Merlin Carpenter in a peripheral way and Nils Norman more recently, is that they did decide to try to forefront the idea of the critic or the critical voice and that is another question about this whole curating issue, which is who possesses the critical voice and people who previously might have become critics as a semi-autonomous activity within the culture now tend to get involved in curating and what

that means for the critical discourse? In Germany, these people published heavily and there has been no equivalent of this in Britain in the last few years. Through *Text zur Kunst* these people had a voice on a monthly basis writing extensive essays about revising historical assessments for Michael Asher, revising historical assessments for themselves, looking at other things, condemning things, taking a position and primarily making a sort of a legacy of…trying to reconstruct something from the fractured and destroyed legacy of sort of hard-left action in Germany, which was so much more of a reality than it ever had been in Britain, like there was no sense of a functional Marxist, Leninist cell attempting to anarchically, physically destroy the culture as there was in Germany. I was very interested in this whole question of their desire to retain a critical voice as a kind of semi-autonomous voice that would be different than the idea of writing for a normal magazine or writing for catalogues or writing something in that way, and that has been the enduring legacy of that group of people.

PON: One of the things I have been thinking recently is that contemporary curatorial practice has been so preoccupied with the mythical boundaries between artistic production and curating whilst the question of curatorial authorship as a meta-artistic activity is not the real issue whereas the great divide is actually between the growing development of recent curatorial practice and lack of any real criticism towards these developments. Ultimately by focusing on a discourse around where the art ends and the curatorial intervention begins produces an inflective discourse that ultimately avoids the key critical question as to what ultimately defines a good curated art exhibition or what a badly curated art exhibition might now be. The curator has somehow replaced the critic as a dominant mode of practice within the wider dissemination of contemporary art in an international context.

LG: I think there are a number of reasons why, like the thing of bright people becoming curators instead of critics. The other thing is the fact that the mainstream magazines also became excited about the idea of the artist as someone who can do lots of things so of course a lot of people who are writing for magazines, possibly more than ever before, are artists. One of the other reasons is that strangely enough, there was an initial idea that the internet could produce this new critical forum and so a lot of people who would have actually started magazines or journals

or become involved in that got lost in the internet at some point, certainly in Germany. I think it is only relatively recently that people have realised that it is not doing the same kind of thing that printed matter does, so there's potentially a re-questioning of the role of the critic. Ten years ago there was this feeling that the only place to do new critical model was via the internet and frankly I don't think it has really happened. It has become an informative tool, like with e-flux and these kinds of things and it remains an academic tool, so you can find essays and so on, but it has not become...It never really worked, so that kind of tripped things up for a while I think.

PON: You talked about this idea that it was the curating that changed in the late eighties and early nineties and not the artwork. Within this statement there is a notion of progress and there is a suggestion that curating became a progressive activity as well as a potential career choice, so there is a kind of emphasis within contemporary art discourse on curating as a developing creative and critical activity, so why then fifteen years later is there such a reductive level of criticism towards this activity?

LG: Because it's a silly way of addressing things, because no one would ever imagine that while there is a shimmering idea of what an artist represents within society and often artists weigh in on that quite happily because it is something that they can use as a veil under which to hide. There is very little assumption in any intellectual discourse that artists are the same or similar. There is an absolute understanding of difference and in fact there has been incredibly sophisticated discourses about that for the last thirty or so years and the idea of recognising the difference between one artist and another and having to deal with that. The problem is at the moment that quite intelligent people who wouldn't for a second conflate the idea of 'artist' as a singular idea will do it with the idea of a 'curator'. In fact, it is quite clear that there are enormously different pressures and factions and people involved in curating and I keep talking about this idea that it is in a dynamic phase and that's just one of those things. You know, we happen to live in a time when curating is in a dynamic phase and that doesn't necessarily mean good, it means that there is a battle going on for power and control and discussion, however to a certain extent that was already happening and already influential on me when I was a student or I was aware of it. I was aware

of the work of Seth Siegelaub, I was aware of the work of Art and Project in Amsterdam, being halfway between being an institution and a gallery and an information discourse idea. I was aware of all these things. Part of it in Britain was to do with class where historically curators came from a privileged class and it was to do with an idea of public service and generosity and interest in continental creativity and that's changed because of the way that education has changed, but also the discussion around curating ironically still tends to focus quite heavily on art. Now it always seems perverse and you get accusations of turning into an old school, imploded, left-wing, ultra self-analysis thing of if you stop talking about what is supposed to be the main event, but in fact the art or the position of the artist now in contemporary discourse is so well protected by so many different forces that actually artists don't need to get worried. You don't need to get involved in a deep analysis of whether it's interesting for an artist to work alone or in a group or not work at all or any of these things. The important site for these questions is the role of the curator and even with some of the recent essays and articles that have been in some of the magazines in Britain for example, there is still a tendency to focus quite a lot on the exhibitions and what was in the exhibitions and who the artists were and very little about the idea of the role of the curator or the psychological component of that or a kind of politicised discussion of power structures. There is a lot of skirting the issue, of not really looking at it in the same way that we might have done historically about artists and part of the reason for that is that it is not in anyone's interest to do that. It is not really in anyone's self-interest to really deconstruct the position of the curator in that way and to look at their potential compromises, their potential conflicts of interest, their potential alliances, their potential career choices, because of course it seems to close down things and when things are in a dynamic phase people don't want to actually stop them happening. They want to just let it continue playing out in order to keep something up in the air for everyone and you notice that projects like Jens Hoffmann's book *The Next Documenta Should Be Curated By An Artist*, was met by the people invited to do it, pretty much generally, by a negative response, which is quite surprising because you would think in the recent past it would have been met with a quite a positive, very clear artist-orientated response. If you asked Martin Kippenberger, he might say yes absolutely, you might say of course artists are the only ones who know what's what and curators are merely working on behalf of artists and an older generation of artists

still think that quite often. It's always odd when you have a situation like if this curatorial position is thoroughly analysed and broken down and deconstructed, then it could stop the interesting aspects of it. That would be the idea. I think that is the collective neurosis about it whereas I don't think it is such a big problem. One of the things being the fact that most of the curators working in most places now are constantly looking at possibilities to move location. They are looking to change jobs more freely or change situations more freely. They don't necessarily have that feeling of being devoted for twenty years to one location or to have found something or be locked into a place or to be fixed in any position. If you really think about them quite heavily, they can create an enormous anxiety for people. If you feel that the structure is in flux and you don't know from one day to the next whether someone is going to be somewhere or somewhere else, then it is very difficult if you break it down very logically and look at the whole situation. There is a strange turning away from the reality of the situation because it's maybe better that way. It's more kind of decent. However, there are cultures in Europe, which focus very heavily on the curator or the director or the person. So in Sweden for example there was a lot of focus on someone like Maria Lind as an individual about what she was doing and what was going on in this museum and so on. In Germany too, there was much more press about Nicolaus Schafhausen than there was about any show he was doing and that doesn't necessarily make it easy and not all the artists are like that to a certain extent. There is a tension when you have a dynamic situation that it is always hard and you need some delicate negotiation. I mean, one of the things that we did at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, when he first took that job, was a conference about criticism. It was very interesting by focusing on the question of criticism rather than curating, it actually revealed a sort of negative discourse, so it revealed a lot about the curating situation by looking at the question of criticism. By inviting people from art magazines, critics and representatives from editorial boards and so on to talk, it was a way of looking at this question of curating without actually saying this is a conference about curating.

PON: The discourse around curatorial practice is so dependent on the vocabulary from other discursive fields of enquiry and curators are happier to talk about or through art and artists instead of about curatorial practice and what it might mean to participate within that as a

curator through talking about the role of the curator within contemporary culture and it is only recently that curators such as Hans Ulrich Obrist or Maria Lind or even Jens Hoffmann have chosen to talk and write about the curatorial positions in relation to other curatorial perspectives, rather than through the work of art.

LG: It is quite clear that Jan Höet has been very clear about what the curator should be, or Rudi Fuchs talks about what a curator should be or Kasper König and so on and to a certain extent they have operated in a situation where questions of quality are one of the key criteria. They talk about the quality of the work or alternatively they work with a kind of consistent group that will continue onwards, but I do think that it is very easy to be generationalist about these things and to say, you know, Rudi Fuchs did all these terrible things and he has a corrupted idea of the critical values around understanding art, but one of things that is important to do is, as well as looking at the way different exhibition models have mutated and changed and influenced each other, there is a clear sense in which people like Kasper König are important for people who think about curating. In the same way that I might mention the name of an artist to a curator that they might be surprised that I might be influenced by or interested in. I think that kind of soft history around the question of recent curating is quite profound in a way, and they are very un-discussed.

PON: Why do you think that this is so?

LG: I think this is partly due to a disinterest on the part of the older generation to discuss them. It is very hard to discuss them with someone who thinks there is not something to discuss and partly due to the fact that the newer generation of curators, even if they are working within an institutional framework, they don't seem to have any interest in taking them over. So Maria Lind couldn't wait to get out of the Moderna Museet or Hans Ulrich Obrist, despite his reputation and you know he gets older all the time, seems to have no interest whatsoever in trying to take over the ARC in Paris or take over anything else frankly. Nicolaus Schafhausen seems relatively happy to stay for now within this Kunstverein structure, which is based on a society of art lovers, which is what a Kunstverein is. This means they haven't offered a challenge to the older generation. It's only institutionalised people who seem to be moving

within these institutions and this may cause… what I think could happen is one of two things, either there will be a new generation of curators who may jump over the level of being involved in these discursive, ad hoc, temporary, small set-up things and jump into the bigger spaces because they realise that no one is challenging these spaces, or the worst thing in some way would be that these people will slowly mutate into the thing that they are not or haven't been historically. They wait out their time and slowly become the more important people, so in ten years time Hans Ulrich is the director of the ARC in Paris and it will be interesting to see if they are prepared to enter into the same, loose, mutating, discourse about curating that they seem to have been able to do around the question of art. I think the next challenge for that generation of curators is to see if they can address what to do with the other curators. There has been some of that due to conferences and discussions, but what tends to happen during these conferences is that people tend to either report on what they have done, which is the kind of classic thing to do or they use distraction techniques and sidestep things and talk about something else completely different like another model, like Hans Ulrich talking about Cedric Price or something instead of talking about the idea of curating without an institution. The question is really what they will do with other curators.

PON: In '92 you published an essay for *Art Monthly* about your concerns about the future and progress of post-graduate curatorial training programmes at the same time as the opening of the RCA course in London. One of your main fears was that they might turn into 'Betty Ford' style clinics for failed gallerists or art dealers, do you think that this initial fear has been ameliorated in some way since then?

LG: I think it has been generally positive because what has happened certainly with the private gallery sphere, while there are a lot of people who have done a form of curating course who are now working in private galleries now, there are a lot of them who are art historians and this is partly to do with the way that the genius of capitalism works to find new ways to retain the notion of the autonomy of the artwork and auratic quality of art, so if you get some bright art historian who studied at the Courtauld Institute to come and work in a private contemporary art gallery they will inevitably bring a certain attitude towards an art object that is different and less contingent than someone who has done a curating

course. One of the other things that I didn't predict at the time was the number of people involved in teaching in these set-ups that are actually artists and they tend to be certain types of artists who maybe can write for example and who are interested in structures and they are interested in various things and if you look at the Royal College or the Whitney [ISP] or even the course at Palais Tokyo, which no one really talks about, which is a small school that they run, there are a lot of artists involved in discussing things so in fact I wonder about a potential reversal, because when I was teaching at Columbia this last semester I was talking to the group of students about the idea of who teaches in art schools and while the students tended to be what you would call neo-conservative in many ways about their expectations in life and what they wanted from their education and being an artist and having a career and they were fairly open about that in a way. One of the things they were not sure about was whether artists were the best to teach them in an art school. They have Jerry Saltz who is a teacher there, who is a critic and they do have Dan Cameron coming in who is a curator, but that's about it and they had quite a strong desire to have much more input from curators as teaching staff. This was very interesting and extremely surprising for me so in a way, I'd be interested in the idea of more curators making the effort to get involved in the processes, not just coming to do a guest lecture, which is the normal model of a curator coming into an art school environment but really doing some of the daily work of influencing how things are discussed and talked about in an art school because even the most progressive art schools are strangely retarded when it comes to discussing anything about the way art is understood or contextualised or structured or presented and so on. That's my big surprise, the number of artists teaching in curator schools and therefore telling people how to behave maybe, and influencing them and secondly the fact that a lot of art students certainly in the US and to a lesser extent in Britain would be interested to have these mysterious people involved.

PON: Do you think that because many of these curating courses have as their end product a collective exhibition done by the students is somehow mimicking the fine art end of year show that has been the default within art schools for many years now?

LG: But they don't in fact if you look at the States in the last ten years or so they have begun to bring in a curator. In Columbia for example they

now bring in a curator to curate the exhibition at the end of the course so the students do have a little interaction with curating but they only have it once at the very end, which of course can be very odd and strangely enlightening. I saw a lot of people who felt suddenly, hang on a minute I get it, there are these other people who work alongside you and stand by your side and consider how things might be done and how things can work in context and sort of have a talk about it. There is even an essay written about all the artists' work in this year's little catalogue thing with images, which is authored by the curator of the show and this is something that if you are looking at it cynically it can be said to be merely smoothing the way for people who want to consume and partake in the potential of these artists but on another level it is an indication of something that maybe should be more involved and embedded in that system. For me the thing is more, if artists at certain moments felt that they could fight for cultural permission to occupy various territories within the contemporary culture and affect meaning and play with structures in that way, I don't see why curators wouldn't be doing the same thing. I mean I would want to be doing the same thing. I'd want to be asking questions about teaching. I'd want to ask questions about who possesses the critical voice. If you could argue that all the important texts about art in the last ten years have been through exhibition catalogues and not magazines…you know there used to be a situation were you have something like 'Last Exit Painting', written by Tom Lawson that was apparently important for art on a certain level. The equivalent essay to that now isn't published in an art magazine but because it's not there, there is a certain kind of lack of editing that muddles the message maybe. You also have the phenomenon of the exhibition where the critique and the work and the curating and the art all become this kind of hermetic loose group of people like a bunch of Roman legionnaires all under their shields sort of stomping about while people try to get into the discourse. Things like the last 'Berlin Biennial' and 'Documenta XI' felt a little bit like that, which again need questioning and need unpacking and need to be looked at again. Also, I think that one of the things that this dynamic period has reduced is this idea of turning to the artist and saying hang on a second what are you doing and not just turning to the curator and asking what have you done? I think this question of repositioning blame or repositioning voice can be quite important, which isn't just to say one would argue for the idea that the artist is right, it's just that sometimes it was the artist who was responsible for the thing that has

apparently imploded or carries a disturbing or retarded message or something.

PON: As regards to self-positioning, you often refer to the notion of the 'middleground' in relation to your work as well as using terms such as 'backdrop' and 'forgeround'. In my own thinking around exhibitions, I often structure the exhibition form around 'background', 'middleground' and 'foreground' works. For me, the background can be the primary layer of the exhibition, where the white walls of the gallery space are converted into a dominant aesthetic experience. The neutral affects of the 'white cube' are reduced to a minimum and replaced by a visual backdrop and propose a distraction for the visitor. Whereas, I have speculated on the 'middleground' as the 'in-between' spaces of experience, where design elements, layout, furniture and display structures produce particular modes of behaviour for the visitor and can be employed to (im-)mobilise the viewer to behave in particular or even prescribed ways. Would you like to elaborate upon what you understand as the 'middleground' of the exhibiting space?

LG: I am interested in the middle ground of social and economic activity. These are the spaces in our socio-economic and psycho-sociological space that are somewhat ill-defined. These enormous gaps can only be described with difficulty, but they need some degree of analysis if their effects are to be understood. Many artists find productive territories within a search for fundamental moments and effects. Others remain within a purely analytical play with the products of complexity. I was interested to develop a sequence of parallel relations with the areas of our life that are most vulnerable to exploitation and control. The implicit freedoms implied in the notion of discussion are not value free. They are hard won and offer an alternative set of tools towards making dilemmas and disagreements less dangerous.

This zone was traditionally seen as problematic in relation to creating functional art. Whereas in the past many artists flirted with the central zone of administrative activity, I was more interested to look at some of its environmental effects. The notion is elaborated in the work around my book *Discussion Island/Big Conference Centre*, just before and just after publication. The book was an attempt to address some of the structural social and political implications of my earlier texts and scenarios like

'McNamara' (1994) and *Erasmus is Late* (1995). I wanted to look at the notion of how the near future is controlled in a post-utopian context - look at how the legacy of 18th century thought produced a battle between planning in speculation. I always wanted to escape the 'eureka' moment, where art is based on a revelatory singularity and found that the creation of a condensed core of ideas could lead to a more complex set of parallel starting points. Yet when I began the book, I found that there were some collapsed narrative problems. So initially, for *The What if? Scenario*, I attempted to create a series of backdrops and contingent structures that could shift around the emerging narrative. At one point, I put the text away completely and concentrated on addressing some out-of-focus ideas. So I began to make work around the idea of discussion, negotiation, compromise and strategy. Not structures that might illustrate these ideas, but things that could designate a provisional space where it might be possible to consider and reassess such effects. This process of aesthetisisation of the abstract middleground unlocked the text and allowed me to write a book without worrying about what kind of space it might be taking place in. The book runs parallel to a sequence of structures but does not describe them. Equally, the work itself spun free and became a productive series of visual markers.

I realised that it might be possible to take some of the prototypical thinking that had emerged in the earlier work and to develop it further. In order to address certain ideas from the centre of action and thinking I began to create a series of overhead platforms and related work that could offer up a space where it might be possible to consider key issues before too many words had been written. The objects really work 'towards' the text. They are not emptied out because no one is expected to fill up some notional sublime void with complex thinking, instead it might be possible for the work to act as a backdrop within which a series of scenarios may be played out. We are no longer dealing with mute object meets profound thought, the relationship is more functional and brittle. A constant flickering of idea, intention and potential towards an excess of access and a reclamation of the middleground. Permission to play out some undefined scenarios within a visual context that mashes design and dogma.

If anything my work is anti structural in the sense that there is no unitary logic to all the elements of a particular project. At all times elements spin off and effect the reading of the work. My interest in time

and the middleground ensures that hierarchies are corrupted but not suppressed into useless structural equivalence.

PON: What kind of a future would you predict for curatorial practice, where is it all going?

LG: I think anything that produces more and more people each year, although we are only talking about tiny numbers of people relative, into a kind of collective activity will tend to reach a point of saturation maybe, although it's a difficult thing to talk about really because when you find out that…like I was talking to someone at the Guggenheim and he said they only had a small set up, they only had 280 people working there but we are interested in growing and I was thinking frankly…that maybe just within the established system there is enough growth as it were to allow for more people, but I think inevitably people look elsewhere for a profound voice. If we're sitting here talking about the idea that people, whoever they might be, might think that curatorial structures are too locked down, too defined something or too didactic or too obvious, then we are probably not…

END OF TAPE

TERESA GLEADOWE

London, 25-03-04

PAUL O'NEILL: In terms of the curating programme here at the Royal College of Art, how would you see the course having developed, in terms of the exhibitions and the content of the exhibitions and the ideas behind the exhibitions and how those aims and objectives have changed since the first end of year shows?

TERESA GLEADOWE: Well, as I'm sure you know, the course started in 1992. Its genesis was quite unusual in that it was born out of an Arts Council initiative, actually the same Arts Council initiative that brought Iniva into the world. This was one of a series of moves made by Sandy Nairne, who was then head of the art department at the Arts Council. He looked both at the state of curatorial practice in this country, and at representation of minority cultures. In setting up the curating course one of the things he was thinking about was that he and his colleagues often attended interviews for curatorial posts in publicly funded spaces, and he felt that most of the candidates he encountered at those interviews had not had the opportunity to have very wide international experience or simply to encounter art outside Britain, and also had not had much contact with theoretical positions, and that they had learned their curatorial practice within the framework of an institution, often in quite a narrow framework, which was determined by the mostly straitened resources of that institution. Or if they were in larger institutions, they might be in a situation where the organizational hierarchy was so firmly in place that it didn't encourage innovation or critical initiatives. So, as I understand it, this was part of the motivating force for the establishment of the RCA course. Before I was appointed, Sarah Wason of the Arts Council of Great Britain and Richard Humphreys of the Tate Gallery, had looked at other curating courses as possible models for this one; the two that they looked at in particular were the Whitney course - the Independent Study Program - in New York and Le Magasin in Grenoble. I think you can see something of both those two models in the initial design of our course, and in the way the course is

structured. So, on the one hand, at the Independent Study Program you have a course grounded in critical theory, with a strong presence of institutional critique in the teaching of Hans Haacke and others, and with a belief that seminar-based debate was the foundation through which discourses could be generated. And then the other model I guess one could describe more as a kind of atelier model, which was Magasin, where there was a functioning gallery and young curators were invited to come and spend an intense period of time working with the staff of the gallery and with a number of visitors who, in the case of Grenoble, would come and spend a few days with the students in quite an informal, hanging out. I know one artist who went and spent some time there and the snow was good and they all went up to the mountains and he kind of articulated his practice through the experience of bombing down the slopes. In those days, I think there was a lot of emphasis at Magasin on a very close contact with artists and other practitioners, and on a kind of a conversation which could be improvised in different ways, and very student led. At that time Magasin had a facilitator who saw herself not so much as a teacher, but as somebody who provided the ingredients of the experience, and programme, and enabled. So, I think those two models continue to be very interesting to us, and the key factor in both of those two models was the fact that students in both cases worked on an exhibition, and that that exhibition had a central place in the whole experience of the course. In fact, neither of those programmes had an academic structure to the extent students didn't do an exam, they weren't academically assessed, and I think that' s still the case. And they were both quite short courses, under a year, and in both cases the exhibition the students made was central to the whole experience. Also, in both cases, and this is important, the exhibition was made by the whole group of students as a collective activity, although the groups were smaller than those we were recruiting at the RCA. But we had a different environment. I think the Arts Council was attracted to the college as a context in which to start this course partly because they knew Christopher Frayling,

who was at that time serving on the Arts Council's Art Panel, and they knew that Christopher, who was then Head of Humanities, was also Course Director of two other joint courses - the History of Design course and the Conservation course - both of which involved partnerships with others, in both those cases with the Victoria and Albert Museum, which provides a large part of the teaching. So that was already interesting as a model for the idea of bringing the Tate in as a teaching partner, which is what Christopher, I think, suggested could happen. It may have come from others; it's part of the history I don't precisely know. The other thing that the college had to offer was its large gallery space, and I think that that was really quite a key factor, along with this experience of running joint courses, in deciding this would be a good environment for the course. Having made that decision, the course needed to conform to the college's academic structures. So this is the place where people do two-year MA courses, and it's also a place where in general the first year is a taught year, and the second year is much more self-directed. So this course was immediately affected by that environment and by the need to put the students through assessment procedures and all those kinds of markers like the interim examination in the first year and final examination in the second year, and to think about what the assessment criteria were going to be, the kinds of things which neither Grenoble nor the Independent Study Program, as far as I know, were thinking about. So then there was a question about how the exhibition was going to work and what role it was going to play, and we had some givens. We had the college galleries, and the offer to the Arts Council was that those galleries would be made available to the curating students for a period of a month, including get in and get out time, and that they would have that as their working space, and because there was just this one month, there was obviously a question as to whether the galleries would be used by a collective, or whether they'd be used by individuals, and we pretty quickly concluded, and I was in the frame by this point, that a collective experience, even on a pragmatic level, was much more manageable. I would say, in the early days we

probably weren' t thinking ideologically about the difference between an individual experience or a collective experience, but we did also think that there could be more than one exhibition, given the nature of the space. The space could be divided fairly easily into two spaces and so we had to think about how the idea for the exhibition was going to be generated, and to begin with we were rather formal about it, and we actually asked students to submit proposals and we had the idea that there was going to be a Board and the Board was going to have to adjudicate in some way. However that first group of students quite quickly disabused us of those kinds of ideas; for instance there were students who said that they weren' t interested to submit an individual proposal because already they were in conversation with others about ideas that they wanted to develop together, so actually when we came to discuss ideas that the students put forward, I think there was one student who put forward two ideas and there was another student who put forward an idea that represented the thoughts of four or five people and so on, and there were other things going on which were social, to do with people who wanted to work together and people who decided that they really didn't want to work with certain other people. So that first show, there were two groups, and I would say it was probably as much a social decision as anything else, but both the ideas that we started with went through several generations before they became the shows that they ended up being, so we were already experiencing what happens when you have a collective or collaborative enterprise operating. And I think that it was evident, even from the start, that because of their situation here, and the fact that they' d already spent the best part of a year thinking about curatorial practice and different models, the students were thinking strategically, they were thinking about the context of the college and the wider environment of Albertopolis and of London and its relationship with other parts of the UK, and London and its relationship with other parts of the world, and of shows that they themselves had seen in London and elsewhere, and of their desires in terms of work that they hadn' t seen and would like to see, and of what the

galleries were likely to do well as physical spaces. For instance, the students had the opportunity to see the Painting Department hanging work in the galleries, and they could see that especially the Henry Moore Gallery, a low ceilinged gallery, is not an easy space in which to show paintings. So, what we ended up with were two shows, one of which was the video show, which I can talk about in a minute, and the other was 'Remote Control', which involved an exploration of the immediate area of the college and of some of the institutions in this immediate area, and which gave rise to some very complex negotiations with people like the Royal Parks, and English Heritage, and the Albert Hall and the National Geographical Society and Imperial College, to try and get permission to site works. Did you see that show?

PON: I didn't, sadly.

TG: I would say that it was an incredibly useful learning experience. It probably wasn't a very successful exhibition, and there were a number of problems, like the graphics were designed by a student here at the college, and they were yellow out of dark green, practically illegible, and there were problems of scale and illegibility of a different kind, such as one so often encounters when one moves out of the gallery space, or with the works, that they were hard to find and even when you found them they just hadn't registered in any way, and then were huge problems with time because negotiations for site permission were so complicated. But I think what that whole experience taught me, anyway, was that the opportunity to fail, or to make mistakes, to try things out that weren't entirely successful, was incredibly valuable - in fact, that the course had to continue to find a way of providing this kind of protected space in which people could experiment and where there was not so much investment in your own success, that that kind of experimentation was impossible. And then 'Acting Out'. The conversations around 'Acting Out' were very interesting. You can directly place some of the things it was influenced by. One of them was the Tyne International called 'Time and Tide',

which we' d been to see earlier in the year, where there were a number of video installations. I think we' d all had a rather uncomfortable experience, standing in booths trying to watch a video with sound leakage, nowhere to sit, very difficult to concentrate, so it made us think about the experience of video installations. We' d also done a trip to Paris, where some of the students spent a lot of time in the Videotech in the Centre Georges Pompidou. It was open at that time until midnight and some of the students spent hours and hours just trawling through the video collection, looking at the stuff they didn' t have access to in London, and they' d never got to see and it was a kind of a revelation. It also made them aware that this would be true for others of their generation who would never have had an opportunity to see work by artists such as Bruce Nauman or Richard Serra, made in the 1970s, and there was also already a conversation going on about self- reflexivity, about what you might now call performativity, about registering in some sense what the curatorial gesture was and what the relationship with the viewer was expected to be. I remember that they came up with an early proposition that, as you came into the space, there would be a mirror which would reflect the viewer, and that kind of thing went on for a while actually, as a primitive manifestation of a desire to question the relationship with the viewer. But then they started really seriously looking at work and they discovered that there were very interesting works in the Tate' s collection as well, which had been acquired for educational purposes, although they weren' t available as museum exhibits, not part of the collection. So they looked at people like early Robert Morris, really immersed themselves in that period and there was also 'Documenta' where Matthew Barney showed for the first time, and they had also worked with Jon Thompson on the installation of 'Gravity and Grace' at the Hayward Gallery because it involved a lot of visiting artists, and Jon and Susan Brades had the idea that it would be interesting to get some of our students to come in for a week, just simply to run errands, keep company, whatever. So several of the students in fact had the experience of working

very closely with people like Mario Merz, but also, I think, the experience of watching Jon Thompson's approach to installation which was very much about setting up conversations between works of art that would make eloquent relationships. And so Jon was one of the people they talked to when they were developing 'Acting Out', and it was Jon, I think, who suggested Steve McQueen who had just finished at Goldsmiths at that time. Steve had made *Bear* as part of his degree show, but hadn't yet had the opportunity to show it as a video installation. So there was a lot of quite interesting discussion about how to present these works and the Architecture Department here was involved. Dinah Casson was then heading up the Architecture Department and she agreed that we could set as a project for her students and they were given a rather detailed brief describing all the work, and they came back with ideas about how all the work could be shown, and interestingly almost all of these ideas, we felt, were completely inappropriate, because they were about trying to decorate the work, make it more 'interesting'. But one of the proposals which, from the Architecture Department's point of view was not very interesting, was made by a student who simply suggested a kind of maze-like circulation for the exhibition, but nothing else. She had just thought about how you would experience the exhibition by wandering through this maze, and we adopted that, and the students then talked about how each work might work within that. People still talk about that show as having been intensely enjoyable, from the viewer's point of view. I think it really was very effective and that it was also probably rather important in terms of making people think about how video installations can be experienced. So, I would say, also that there was already a level of ambition about the shows, which has been sustained.

PON: I remember you saying in your paper for the conference *Curating in the 21st Century* at Wolverhampton, you referenced Seth Siegelaub's idea of the demystification of the curator and making visible the kind of mechanics involved in exhibition making, do you still think that that's a priority within the programme, do

you still think it has relevance?

TG: When I used the Siegelaub quote in the published paper that came out of that conference, I think that what I was really trying to do was to show, in as dramatic a way as I could find, the ways in which curatorial practice appears to have changed over a period of a few decades. Seth Siegelaub seems to me to be admirably clear, admirably able to articulate some of those things that have happened, not just to curatorial practice but also of course to the art world. As far as I recall that particular text by him (and there are many as he is very good at this kind of thing) he talks, for instance, about the way in which the art world has expanded. The audience today is huge compared with this fairly private conversation that was going on in the late sixties. It might be a worldwide conversation, which he dealt with through his postal projects, but you could pick out the individuals very easily. So I don't think that actually the question of self-reflection or transparency of practice was the key thing I was talking about there. But it's true that Siegelaub has thought deeply about his role and it's interesting to me that he stopped working as a curator at the point that he felt that his attempt, actually at neutrality, was blown by the fact that there was a recognizable style to the projects that he made. As I understand his practice in the sixties, I think what he was trying to do was to set a frame which was kind of as dull as he could make it, so that the creative effort would be clearly coming out of the artists' practice. So if you think about something like the 'January Show', it's completely factual, kind of dry. So I think that it may be an almost inevitable consequence of curatorial education that people think about their own practice, and I think it may also be the case that if you set up that kind of environment, anybody you invite to come and talk to the students, any practising curator or critic or artist, will probably address themselves in preparation for making any kind of presentation, and then address the students in a way that has a degree of self-inquiry, which you might not find in another environment.

PON: And do you think between those earlier shows like 'Remote Control' and 'Acting Out' as exhibitions, or if we take them as autonomous objects, in relation to the last two shows, 'The Straight or Crooked Way' in 2003 and 'This much is certain' in 2004, that not only the climate within international curating has changed, but also the priorities of the group collective, the student collective, in terms of approaches to curation or the models they may be looking at?

TG: Well, there weren't the models really in '93, '94. And there weren't the debates about, for instance, individual practice versus collective or collaborative practice. So, yes, there are very, very different debates, just as there are in art practice, because the whole idea of a collaborative collective art practice has become paradigmatic itself. I think that what you could possibly say has happened is that as that whole climate, environment, has changed, a sense of ideological engagement with collectivity has grown, so whereas I was describing the first exhibitions as, being pragmatically collective, because you've got a certain amount of space and you don't want to divide it up into little boxes, I think now that we're much more interested to think about what the gains can be, from this collective experience of curating, that is to say the gains for the curators themselves, for the exhibitions they make, and for the audience. These are all gains in terms of the students' understanding of what their future practice might be as curators. We've also become much more serious about understanding how to support students put into that kind of collaborative or collective situation. When we started, none of us of course had any experience of anything like this, so we all kind of jumped in together, and it was brutally difficult at times, but I think that we have become much more conscious of the difficulty, and of the need to be inventive by supporting the collaborative process. For instance, three years ago we introduced an interim project, which gives students the opportunity to work together on a project outside the college, with a much smaller budget, with a much lower sense of investment, and with the

possibility to work with people outside the college and to be lighter footed and fun. It's also an opportunity for the students to learn something about working with each other, and that' s been extremely helpful. The other thing is that we now arrange for the students to go away somewhere, for four days, and stay in a house in the country, preferably one where mobile phones don' t work so well! I guess it' s a kind of management training device. And then last year we had an actor come and lead a theatre workshop; he was an actor from the Theatre of Complicite and he led a workshop that was all about defining space and relationships in space, so it was like a physical exploration of some of the conceptual problems that the students would encounter when working as a group, learning to rely on each other, learning to define your own space, learning to build together, and they loved it. According to the actor they were physically inarticulate (compared with professional actors or dancers), but incredibly conceptually engaged by the whole idea. We might do that kind of thing again; we' re always looking for ways now to think about this problem of building collaborative relationships, so that, I would say, is really different from when we first started.

PON: Since say 2000, from 'Democracy' onwards, there seems to be a shift in the curatorial priorities, in that it' s moving away from the sense of the exhibition as a grand narrative or the exhibition as a storyline, more into the kind of experience of space, or spatiality, rather than a thematic.

TG: Did you see 'You Are Here?' It was a show that took a number of installations which had been made for other specific spaces and asked what would happen if they were re-sited elsewhere, so that, for instance, a piece by Mona Hatoum which had already entered the Arts Council' s collection, but was first made for the Showroom in Bonner Road, was shown here, and a work by Mike Bode which was a recreation of a hospital corridor. This was an exhibition that was very much about the experience of space. And I think actually that's true of 'Acting Out' as well. It was very aware of the

experience of the viewer following this kind of labyrinthine path. Another thing that the students did with 'Acting Out' (which is not so dissimilar from the cinema they made for 'This much is certain') was that they curtained all of that glazed wall in the Henry Moore Galleries, made a curved screen wall behind it, and so made a kind of enclosure, and in the enclosure they had space for some chairs, laid out lounge style, and there was a coffee table and then they had a show-reel on a long loop, which showed an anthology of material, which was part of the show. So, with that first show the students were thinking already about different ways of experiencing art, and what we would now call the 'chill-out' space was already beginning to appear. I think what was actually happening was that these young curators were thinking about how they themselves wanted to look at art, and they were extrapolating from their own desire, into the environment that they then created for the viewer. One of the things a curatorial programme can provide is the opportunity for young viewers to realize those desires. 'Make Believe' also had a reading room and a viewing space where you could just hang out and read related literature, and 'Acting Out' had a little 'picnic space', where you could watch Roman Signer's videos on a monitor and browse related literature. So I think a conversation with the space has always been very much a part of the students' project. Thinking about what the space can and can't do - and sometimes thinking about what it can't do and then trying to make it do it anyway. 'The Straight or Crooked Way' was exemplary in the way that it broke all kinds of rules, not least by cutting the space in half and interrupting circulation.

PON: Also in your paper for *Curating in the 21st Century* you suggested that: 'Within the curatorial profession there seems to be a marked shift away from art historical research and scholarship. It might be suggested that professionalisation of curatorial training is partly responsible for this decline, as it tends to privilege new approaches to exhibition making and engages in a critique of the contemporary curatorial condition.' I also

think this is very true, but coming from your own point of view it is especially interesting, as someone responsible for the education of curating within such a course as that at the RCA, how do you see that being dealt with now and how can we propose an alternative or deal with this lack of scholarship or lack of history.

TG: Well I guess I'm going to take a long view, and I think that there are shifts happening already. It's interesting that most of the high profile international curators of the 1990s generation, including Hans-Ulrich Obrist, have another practice that runs parallel to the practice which attracts most attention, and that is the practice of making monographic shows; they tend to do that with acute attention. I think there is a need for a consciousness of art history. Actually we've tried to encourage that in the show this year and many of them have included work that's cross-generational. 'Democracy' for instance, included work by Group Material and Clegg and Guttman as precedents for the collaborative and socially engaged practices that were the subject of that exhibition. But it does seem as if an a-historical approach to museum displays, collection displays, was a characteristic of the 1990s. It started as a radical gesture and was kind of anti-canonical, but I think you could argue that it's become a convention and that's why I think I mentioned in that article the 'Force Fields' exhibition, which Guy Brett had recently done at the Hayward Gallery. This seemed to me an exemplary show because it was physically absolutely beautiful in the way that it inhabited space and it also opened up large areas of work with which I was either not familiar or only partially familiar. It surprised me by showing, for instance Hans Haacke's early work which was visually sensuous and gorgeous and made me think differently about other aspects of his practice. So that was the kind of show I was thinking about when I wrote that.

PON: Because it does seem that one of the more exciting aspects of the shows that I've seen here is the interest in making

apparent historical precedents and I think that the more exciting aspect to someone like Hans Ulrich's practice is that he is a great collector of knowledge. You know, very eclectic, and how it ends up manifesting itself within the exhibition is another thing, but I think that what he's really good at is gathering such material together.

TG: He's a great distributor as well. He re-distributes information in a really generous kind of way. I think he's quite an incredible force in the world, and also an idealist.

PON: I mean I know you're working on a book at the moment. Would you like to say a little bit about that?

TG: I am working on it, but I'm still finding my ideas, but it's in this kind of territory. Not so much looking at curating courses, although I may also try and do that, but also trying to think about how this particular course has got to where it is, which I began to do in *Curating in the 21st Century*. So I'm trying to look a bit wider.

PON: Because I wonder, I mean one of the reasons why I decided to research this area is not only because of my own practice but also because of a lack of finding published material on the subject, and also the kind of, certain kind of publications have almost become canonical, because books such as *The Power of Display* by Mary Anne Staniszewski, or Bruce Althshuler's book, or even *Curating in the 21st Century* are so few, and there is a lack of scholarly publications.

TG: I agree. One of the things I've been doing, you know, as one does, is to trawl through the existing literature. There is quite a lot more than there was; there has been quite a lot published in the last four years. But it's mostly conference proceedings, or narrative accounts by curators of their own practice, and the question is how one can cut into that, make some kind of critical

entry into it, while still respecting specific histories.

PON: One of the things that I found, for example, most difficult, with that material, is, as you said, it's very autobiographical and it's curators defining their positions through their practice and how they articulate that within a particular public situation, but also it creates a certain vacuum, a void between curating and its history, and there is such a gap between that kind of material and say the more art historical exhibitionary display practice and its potential futures. I'm going to ask one last question that I've asked everybody, just to finish. How do you see the future of curatorial practice?

TG: I don't know. Curating has become a kind of all embracing metaphor for so many kinds of activity that seem necessary in our present world. I think it's partly to do with a sense that there aren't new territories to explore; we can only re-see. Curating at its best enables this to happen, by producing connections between works of art, histories, situations. I think that's why there's such an enormous amount of interest in curating, not just as a narrowly defined activity, but as a kind of metaphor for a necessary activity in the world, and it's also about relationships with space, and relationships to place. As to what will happen next, I don't know.

PON: In some ways it would seem to me that, say, the last shall we say twelve years, in which you've been very involved in it, there's been a parallel development between the professionalisation of the practice and the raising of the critical consciousness around curation, and that has been made even more apparent with such a visibility of the curator of international exhibitions. But it seems to me to be almost, it's almost reached saturation point, where you have different types of curators being, or different kinds of curatorial models being used within the same exhibitions. For example in Venice 2003 last year or in 'Documenta XI' the year before, where you know, you have the

curator as manager, then you have the curator as performer, the curator as collaborator, and they're all almost looking to, almost a need to make the parameters of what a curator does more flexible, more soft, if you like, and not as hard.

TG: Well I think that's why I said that curating has become a kind of metaphor for operating in the world. But that's only echoing art practice which increasingly, I think, becomes defined as a kind of space of operations, an area in which one can think in different ways, rather than being media-based, genre-based, discipline-based.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

ANNA HARDING

London, 07-02-04

PAUL O'NEILL: When you took over the post at Goldsmiths, the MA in Creative Curating, the particular cultural climate that existed at the time, which that started, do you think that there has been a significant shift between then and now?

ANNA HARDING: I'd like to think so. I'd like to think that people working in the curatorial field are a bit more critically aware about what it is that they do, and they think more carefully about the responsibilities that they take on and the power that they wield, because actually, I left working in a gallery because I realised that being a gallery Director at Kettles Yard, my job was eighty percent fundraising and despite it being a university gallery, there's very little space allowed in institutions for any kind of curatorial reflection and though institutions are becoming forced more and more by funding bodies, particularly the Arts Council, to be accountants, managers, to bring in more consultants and to spend all their energies on the building and targets to do with numbers and it's all accounting speak that came in the early nineties. I remember once being told by the Arts Council that I would be better off in my job if I was a qualified accountant. As a gallery Director, this is what I was told when I was applying for something like one of those enhancement funding type schemes, exhibition franchise or something. I thought this was very disturbing that people who are running these institutions are being forced more and more into the mindset of an accountant, and there was little credence given for, or value given to curatorial research or any quality of engagement in the subject that you're working with, which is very different from the States, because I trained in the States and there's a very different kind of respect for scholarship and scholarly research in exhibitions. I find the same in Germany and Austria, but in this country, it's part of the sort of charity work, it's all to do with being seen to have equal opportunities policies, audience development policies, having all this monitoring in place, becoming increasingly bureaucratic. I was really attracted to Goldsmiths because I felt that this was absolutely the right place to be standing up for what I thought

curating should be, which is something which is centred in art practice, to make that statement by having a course in a fine art department was incredibly important, and I'd worked over previous years with quite a number of artists who'd come out of Goldsmiths, so I felt very sort of aligned to a Goldsmiths way of thinking in terms of a kind of criticality, and I thought this was the ideal place to be discussing curatorial practice, and if I could do anything to build a kind of confidence in the UK in a practice which wasn't purely management speak, because there's these arts management courses, and wasn't just about fundraising and meeting these other targets which are nothing to do with artistic targets, then that was a really good thing. So when I saw the job advertised, I thought that was something I could do! I was also very interested because I left England after doing a BA to do a curating post-graduate course in the States, they didn't exist in England.

PON: Where did you do that?

AH: I did it in Illinois. University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, it was one of two courses funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, which were really fantastic and thorough kind of grounding in contemporary art museum curating.

PON: What kind of people were teaching there at the time?

AH: It was a practical vocation course so it was the museum Director, the museum curators who were looking after collections and exhibitions, and then we did a lot of visits with people in Chicago, so it would be art collectors, conservators, and then in New York we'd go to meet people in auction houses, it was very much about building up a contemporary art collection, looking at how programming worked. There wasn't any critical curatorial element to that course, I did it in conjunction with an MA and I switched half way through from Art History to Art Education, because my preoccupation was to do with why people have such a

problem engaging with contemporary artworks, why people have a problem going into galleries to start with, and then don't know what questions to use to engage with works, and feel that they've got the answer wrong, or feel completely inadequate in front of the works. I couldn't get anywhere through art history in tackling those problems, nor through the curatorial training. That's what I was really interested in, so I sort of cobbled together my own sort of study through looking at education theory, psychology and perception theory, which was kind of odd, but there just wasn't anything to hand, all the art history stuff was connoisseurship and coming from a BA in London where we were completely questioning all of that, we were kind of post-modern art historians completely critiquing this stuff, then going to the States where it was still the kind of modernist trajectory, I didn't have any tools. I had collected tools through first hand experience by working with artists. I learnt my curatorial practice I suppose through working with artists and artists who curated their shows, or who I invited to make a show, and then saw how they did it.

PON: And was that kind of artist as curator the model that you felt was most representative of what was going on, say, in London at the time?

AH: At the time in London in the early eighties, I wasn't aware of anything of that type taking place. Well there were a few small galleries like Moira Kelly, Acme Gallery, Air Gallery.

PON: So there was quite a difference between the cultural climate, at that time when you were studying, and the early to mid nineties, the mid nineties, when you started working at Goldsmiths?

AH: In the States I was quite informed by the alternative spaces in Chicago and Minneapolis, like the Women's Art Collectives, and the Video Collective and Performance Collectives. Although I was

working in an art museum, those were the kind of quite inspiring places. In fact the first show I organised was with a Mexican woman from Chicago called Nereyda Garcia, who I just came across through people at my university, and I just said look, come down to this place, I'm in the middle of this campus university in Illinois, and come from London and suffering complete culture shock, so people I identified with were other people who suffered that culture shock. So she came and showed quite kind of campaigning video work and drawings and it was quite political, and then my other best friend at college was an African American guy from the south side of Chicago, who again was completely, we didn't fit in basically, we didn't fit in with the American mid-Western kind of protocol behaviour, through feeling like you don't fit in, you find your own language or ways of doing things.

PON: It seems that one of the key differences between the Goldsmiths course and other post-graduate courses like the Bard and like the Magasin or RCA, is that it very much focused on the idea of the individual curatorial projects rather than the idea of coming up with an end product exhibition, as a collective group?

AH: I think that's partly because it's in a fine art department, and therefore it's very difficult to assess group practice, and I think you'll find if you look at the RCA course, for instance, their exhibition isn't part of their examination, it's an add on, it's not central, and in Goldsmiths your personal is absolutely core to the course, that's what it's all about is developing your sense of your practice. It's very much based on a fine art teaching philosophy, the people behind the course were Michael Craig-Martin and Nick De Ville, they saw the teaching methodology of fine art being completely appropriate to curating, and I tend to agree with them, which is basically using a seminar forum for allowing people to test out their work in progress in a group of peers who are supportive but also willing to interrogate each others' work, and to build up peoples' awareness and confidence through seminar, a real sense of what your personal practice is,

and what your personal research is, and a lot of one to one tutorial support, which none of those other courses have, which are all about the group mentality - I think that's a really soft option. I think that's fine if you want to produce a lot of people who will be clones in an institution and behave in the correct manner, but if you want to train people who are going to be able to have an artistic lead in an organisation or develop an individual programme of any interest, you need them to feel confident in their own judgments, and you can only really do that by being given the opportunity to stand on your own two feet, in an environment where it's safe to do that. When you're youngish you don't get many of those opportunities in a work situation, but if you are at college you can take a few risks and try things out. Well that's what I think the Goldsmiths course is there for - to encourage people to feel that they can try something, see where it leads.

PON: From my point of view one of the primary differences between say Goldsmiths and the RCA is the notion of the projects, the notion of research as paramount and the relationship between that research and the possibility of a realisation of a project based on that, which at Goldsmiths is very individually driven, but if we take the other model of a collective group exhibition as a final product for a post-graduate course it appears to take Seth Siegelaub's idea of the 'demystification' or the demythologising, demythologisation of the role of the curator and by making the role seem more visible within the thematic curated exhibition, but actually there is a sleight of hand which remains visible within the group collective. There is little clear sense of ownership, or individual responsibility for the decisions that have been made.

AH: That's what the Goldsmiths course is about, is responsibility for your own actions, and the other thing it's good for is that you've got nothing, you have nothing but yourself, if you're trying to persuade someone that your show is a good idea and they should take part, you don't have any money, you don't have any

venue, it's really down to whether they believe in you or not, and whether there is trust and it's a personal contract. It's not like you hiding behind an institution. For example, if you offered an artist two thousand pounds to be in a show, they're likely to say yes, and if you say, 'we've got this lovely posh venue', of course they're likely to say yes, but if you go up to someone and say look, I'm really working at this, I'm going to try and get five grand off the Arts Council, but at this point I'd just like your commitment that you think it's good and you'd like to take part and you'll go on the journey with me, so that's the difference really, it is about being at the same starting point as any other partner in the project, that you're not starting off with this position of having power tools.

PON: You appear to be suggesting that there's a distinction between different types of non-institutional curating and there's different types of institutional curating, but to me one of the significant differences between those two models if you could divide them into those two systems of production, is that so called 'independent' curators predominantly work in association with, or through dialogue with artists and that is the starting point, whereas institutions begin with the loan forms, consignment forms, going to the gallery collectors, etc., so for a curator starting out, there's a distancing between the institutional process and the curatorial objective.

AH: Curating comes out of the idea of borrowing objects from collections, and institutions tend to deal with artists as if they were just people whose collection they were borrowing from. For example, my husband is currently in a big show in Europe with a hundred artists or something, it is a major museum show, massive budget publication, whatever, but they don't think to invite you to the opening or pay for your fare or offer you a fee, it never occurs to them. Probably because I think they're used to thinking, OK, this is our checklist of works that we want to borrow, and get this one from that collection and this one happens

to be from an artist, and they don't think of that person, and that this is their livelihood, and that actually, it's not just some sort of object I'm taking off my wall and inconvenienced for a few weeks, it's actually, this represents me and my aspirations and I want be part of your project, and I want to be part of the conversation, and really a lot of artists actually enjoy being asked. It seems obvious, really.

PON: It supports this notion of a curator as merely a host producer or as deejay remixing, mixing and remixing these cultural forms.

AH: I'd say that's what conventional medium curating is like.

PON: I think that this idea of the curator as DJ is representative of what has been happening with international biennials whereby certain artists and certain works are being recycled. We could go through the list of artists that were at 'Venice Biennale' 2003 and if you go through the list of the artists in 'Documenta 10' and '11', you come up with a large percentage which were showing in both. So I was wondering if you would maybe say something, a little bit about that?

AH: Yes, that's another distinction between courses. I think that at the Goldsmiths course, I very much encourage people to pursue their own interests, regardless of where they're coming from, rather than feel that there's a group of fashionable names they have to know about. I do know that on certain courses, they have people come in who say this is an important artist, this is someone you've got to watch out for, which is like reading a fashion magazine and being told, you know, what length of skirt is going to be in season. So I always avoided that fashion issue. It's actually about, what are you as a person engaged in? What are the kind of things that you want to look at? It's not about following fashion.

PON: Would the Goldsmiths graduates have gained a consciousness of other models of curating?

AH: Yes very much so. I don't think we would never have taught them that this is the canon, these are the important shows you need to know about, but by providing them with an ample bibliography, there's an opportunity to do wide research. Like if you're teaching art students, you don't say these are the three artists you've got to know about, it doesn't work like that. It's more like seeing what they are interested in, and then referring them to things that they might not know about which relate to the practices that interest them. So if someone's particularly interested in digital, net art, you refer them to Ars Electronica and various specific interactive exhibitions. If you were purely saying, well this is the canon of great shows, I don't suppose any of those products would figure, but actually it's a very substantial and important area of contemporary art practice. So there's a kind of diversity of interests in the Goldsmiths course. You know we never specify media or any kind of canon.

PON: Would you say that the emphasis of individual students' practice has changed noticeably since the early nineties? Has there been a shift in the basic premise for their various research projects? Have the students end projects moved with the notion of 'artist-curator' in the 1990s that was very much a part of what was happening in London with artist-run spaces, such as City Racing or Bank etc., and the whole DIY attitude certainly came out of Goldsmiths, was that you could put on your own show.

AH: I'd say the whole course is based on a DIY aesthetic really, you're starting from scratch with the creative aspect of the course which is finding out how the hell you're going to pull it off - how on earth you're going to beg, steal or borrow all the resources you need to make it happen, that's like creative accounting or the creative in an advertising agency, how you're going to come up with something that's so compelling that everyone

is going to believe you. That's where the creativity I think lies ultimately.

PON: And do you think there is as much of a necessity for post-graduate courses in creative curating now than when the Goldsmiths course started?

AH: Well, I'd say the Goldsmiths course has always been completely open about where you might practise, but within any project we always insisted on people acknowledging the context in which they worked, having a clear understanding of the context. It may well have been a conventional museum space or it may be having an understanding of the commercial side to independent curating, or a non-profit version of independent curating. I think they're quite distinct actually, and this notion of alternative practice is something we'd always be unpicking and something I think people like City Racing are always critiqued on - it was independent until you were picked up by the Lisson Gallery, that was always a kind of cliché, wasn't it? So there was no naivety about it. Something I have always been very, very clear on is that you can be as free within an institution as you can be within your own living room, it's all in your head actually, this notion of independence.

PON: I think it has been really important to retain the idea that curating doesn't necessarily have to end with an exhibition and that there are other places and ways to practise curatorially and Goldsmiths seems to be very much about a social context and cultural context in relation to the individual curator's project.

AH: I think that's very much my input. I encourage people not to be scared of working in weird places because it's only by doing that, that you build up peoples' confidence in accepting that as being valid art practice, and if you can't do it at college, when will you ever be able to? It's like this is your chance in a lifetime to do something that you're really interested in, even

though it may be a bit out of the way, it might be in Deptford market or something. I think with a lot of curating courses, there's really a sense of protocol which museums are obsessed by, in terms of being seen to be in the right place at the right time, and we were just quite irreverent about that and we thought this is Goldsmiths, you've already got this kind of prestige hanging over you, so you can do what you want. You don't have to only show in this gallery, because actually people are going to look at what you do because it's already validated, and that's a huge strength. I think if you were doing the course at some unknown art college, you might be desperate to have a show. You know like a lot of regional art colleges have a degree show in London every year and they want to be shown in the Truman's Building or something that's considered to have the appropriate edge to it, because it wants to buy in to a certain identity. I think the difference is, Goldsmiths already has that edge, so therefore you can afford to be quite free with where you position yourself.

PON: Do you think that being detached from having an exhibition space at the college makes a difference? I know that they collaborate every year with the South London Gallery, but that appears to be something collaborative.

AH: Well just like the whole course, I set that up in the first year and kept it running, apart from one year when they were refurbishing and we had to go elsewhere, it has been a very fruitful collaboration. There have been a lot of other collaborations along the way, but I remember it being actually, I remember asking the department if they would like me to set up a formal collaboration with other institutions, and I was advised against it, because I think they are a bit wary of being identified - I think RCA has got this strong identity with Tate, but it doesn't do it any favours, I think. Well they probably perceive it as doing them a huge favour in terms of validation, but it's sort of double validation negates the validation, you know what I mean? But also, I really wanted to make sure the

students made the choices, and that if they wanted to do something at the Hayward, they could just ask them, that there was nothing to stop them from doing that. So, there was one project at the Hayward called 'Things'. Also although it's not apparent on the surface, the course promotes a huge amount of networking with that professional sector. All the students have six to eight independent tutorials set up with anybody who they want to see, and they never have any problem getting gallery directors, all the international curators you mentioned, critics, whatever, to give tutorials to them. They're always delighted to do it, so each student figured out who's important for them, who they need to validate their, not just validate their practice, but to interrogate their practice, who they really valued. So, for instance, a student setting up a new space in East London, I recommended that she did a tutorial with Sarah Kent of *Time Out*, I said 'look, you're going to rely on this person, you need her to understand what you're doing, to validate what you're doing, and if you can spend two or three hours with her, explaining what it is, getting her advice on how to promote your project, not only is she an astute artist, a feminist, she knows her stuff, but she'd also be a great ally'. So you could call that cynical or call it a smart thing to do, and since then her shows are always reviewed in *Time Out*. That's just a tiny example. If you know somebody's really got an interest in working with a certain area of practice, you make sure that they set up tutorials with the experts in that field, so not only do they have the kind of high end debate but also, if ever there's future work going on in that field, people will know to ask them. So there's a huge amount of tying in with other professional people and bodies, even though it's not just like we are in collaboration with Tate.

PON: Curating is also historically a spatial practice, and it's a spatially defined practice, so half of the battle is actually to locate the best particular space for a given project. That space doesn't necessarily have to be a physical space, it could be a website or it could be a book or it could be non-existent. Would

the use of other spaces of display be encouraged within the MA at Goldsmiths, as distinct from the exhibitionary model?

AH: They are equally valid, yes. But also, you know the pros and cons of each of those scenarios. Working with a web curated project can mean that a lot of people in the conventional art world don't notice it, so does that bother you or do you have to find ways of bringing those people on board? Ultimately, who are you talking to, who's it for? I think a lot of galleries, OK, maybe once a year they have one of those days where they all put their heads together and remind themselves of who they're there for, but ultimately they try and serve everybody, whereas if you're doing something that's quite clearly defined as a web project with this particular artist, you should also have a very focused idea of who it's for, who it's going to interest. It's a very, very tight kind of market, I suppose.

PON: You said earlier that you are wary of representing or teaching a particular canon of curating, but ironically your book on curating, *Curating: The Contemporary Art Museum and Beyond* has already become part of an essential reading canon of curatorial publications, and particularly around the time it was published, when there were very few books with 'curating' in the title. What was your thinking behind that publication and what were the aims and objectives for you at the time?

AH: Well, I got a call saying, are you interested? I thought wow, what a lovely thing to do, so, how did I pick those? I basically thought they're the people I find most interesting at the moment. Next year I'll find something else equally of interest! It's only definitive at one moment in time in one particular context.

PON: If you do web search or a keyword search, and you put in the word 'curating', you'll get *Curating in the 21st Century* edited by Dave Beech and Gavin Wade, and you get *Curating: The Contemporary*

Art Museum and Beyond edited by Anna Harding, and then three or four other publications, so it's still quite a significant publication. It is part of a small publishing canon and it lays out a particular type of curatorial territory of the 1990s. There were certainly particular curatorial attitudes represented through that publication.

AH: There was also a lot of interest in these projects about people using their homes as a gallery at the time. Don't forget, this is commissioned, it's a commission for Art and Design publishing. They see it as being a trendy issue, so they want to have a journal issued about it, and so I happened to be conveniently in the right place in the right time. There are two articles about curating performance art, which is something that I'm very interested in. Declan McGonagle got to write an article, I think it was a kind of feat to persuade some of those people to actually write something. With the people who never have time to write, I said this is going to be really important, this is really worth making the effort for, you know, people did really pull the stops out for this.

PON: It's probably a very difficult question to answer, but if you were asked to do curating at a contemporary art museum, whom would you consider commissioning there?

AH: Ooh, that would be good! Well I'm actually involved at the moment in stuff to do with urban regeneration and I think that kind of art and politics question, does art have any kind of political role, does art practice nurture creativity? I have always been interested in the transformative potential of art. I'm quite interested in how it's become much more closely aligned and picked up by certain political agendas, so you know, post-'Documenta'. I've been involved in this project called 'Republic Art' over the last three years, I've been a co-organiser, with our website which is about reconsidering what public art practice could be, so these are things I am involved with.

PON: Would you consider re-inviting some of the people that took part in the first one?

AH: I think all the people in the first one are still all doing equally valid stuff. I'd like to do it, I'd like to think about it.

PON: That's what really interests me is how visible one publication is within a very, very small canon...

AH: It looks nice! I think it's still valid, basically. OK, it is of a moment in time, but I don't think there's anything there that anyone would write differently or I don't think any of those practices have dropped out of the picture.

PON: Yea, that's what I feel is so significantly interesting about it and it's definitely representative of a range of debates that are still current; the relationship between artist and curator, the idea of performativity within curating, the role of collecting, amateur collecting within contemporary art practice, the relationship between curating, spatial theory and architecture, curating and site specificity and place. It also successfully transcended the whole post-colonial museological debate, which at the time was more than prevalent in curatorial discourse.

AH: I suppose interests in locality and local difference and representation are just really, really endlessly interesting!

PON: I also wanted to ask you about your 'Potential Ongoing Archive', actually. Maybe you could tell us something about that as a kind of a curatorial practice, the role of the archive within curatorial practice and the role of curating within constructing an archive, I suppose there are two things within one.

AH: Well I think it was just a rather pompous title! It's not

really an ongoing archive apart from, a life of accumulation of experience, but I suppose it's just saying that nothing is definitive and things always should be left open. People should always remain open to and aware and receptive to, and so should archives any kind of form of practice. You know, you can't describe your practice and then stick with it for the rest of your life, or you'd be repeating, just repeating a formula. Did you want to know about the archive?

PON: Well, I suppose, what is the archive to you, related to your practice?

AH: Well the comment that phrase refers to is that I was, I am very interested and aware of how peoples' personal archives can be very central to their practice, and how it's an aspect of their work that's usually hidden, and that you have this kind of body of stuff which is your practice, whether it's computer files or a studio full of material or your library, and then when the occasion comes along, you pull something out of a heap and say, oh that'll do, send this one out for a bit, and I was kind of trying to suggest that actually the archive is the centre of the practice, and these paintings in this show or an exhibition here, publication there, are just kind of outings from the practice itself, which is an archive. So the archive continuously reshapes, so the individual work can have different meanings as the archive reshuffles or reforms itself. So if you have a photographic archive, according to what additional things you add to your collection, the significance of one changes. That project was very much about artists who have that kind of archival view of material, whether it's archive material.

PON: My personal archive is basically everything that I haven't thrown away.

AH: Yeah, so maybe I just wanted to raise awareness, or make visible this process aspect of all of our practice. We have all

this material that we juggle with and then the thing that gets sent out is a very, kind of, edited version. For instance, someone in that show was Nils Norman, who made this big project about adventure playgrounds in London, and he's someone that I really enjoy talking with because he's a passionate researcher, and he accumulates bodies of knowledge, and we share quite a lot of interest in the sort of areas that we amass research in. And then for an exhibition you put out a very tiny little aspect of that, don't you? Which is kind of concise and manageable in the form of an exhibition. So actually exhibitions are really just about a time and motion study. People can only take in a certain amount of information. In Irit Rogoff's essay about 'How to Dress for an Exhibition', it's much more about the social experience of gliding through this beautiful white space and feeling wonderful in it. So it's tasters, isn't it?

PON: One last question, what do you think have been the most recent developments within contemporary curating say in the last fifteen years?

AH: I think an unfortunate development has been institutional obsession with star, the world of pop stars, till a point where not only is it who gets exhibited, but also who goes to the openings and also wanting to have star curators' names attached to exhibitions as another selling point. I published an essay last year about marketing led curating. It's in a Scottish magazine that Malcolm Dixon edits. He used to edit *Variant*, it's called *Matters*, from Glasgow. The essay was called 'Where do we go from here?' How do art and curatorial practice maintain criticality? You can maintain criticality but be completely invisible, and it's how do you maintain a balance between - I think it's about finding other forums which aren't necessarily the conventional art world forums for visibility, because I think that the institutions in London are so preoccupied with their image, there's no space in there for any experimentation. I have to say I think it's much more a test of someone's curatorial ability to see them work with

a particular venue for five years than to see them run from one biennial to the next, because you can run off and hide a world of sins. Actually being able to work with the same group of people next time is a test. There's a lot of fairly shitty behaviour in the art world, people taking advantage or doing things for no money or running off and not paying the bills, really crappy stuff goes on, but I think if you can actually kind of maintain a commitment to something for a number of years, and to one place, I think it's much more a test of your mettle. I think there's a lot less scope for young curators in institutions to do interesting things. It makes the job very boring. I mean, OK, you might have the creative scope of commissioning some interesting writing for a catalogue, or working on the design, but in terms of your active engagement and research with art, artists feeding the programme, you probably do not get many opportunities and therefore, to keep up that engagement and make use of it is probably not so easy.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

MATTHEW HIGGS

New York, 02-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator? Or is this even a term that you're comfortable with?

MATTHEW HIGGS: The term's fine. I became a curator, directly or indirectly, out of my teenage experiences of organising things. There was always an impulse to organise things. As a teenager in the late 1970s I published a music fanzine and promoted concerts in my hometown Chorley, in the North West of England. And I'd say that my subsequent interest in organising exhibitions or working with artists on projects emerged from a similar set of concerns, which were designed primarily to alleviate boredom, make something happen, and to somehow get closer to, or become more involved with the thing that you're interested in. When I eventually went to art school in the mid 1980s I found the idea of being an artist somewhat disappointing, I guess the perceived singularity of being an artist just didn't appeal. Somehow trying to make one's own practice more collaborative appealed. And one of the ways to do that was to simply start working on projects with other people. So I think all of those things combined contributed to how, or why, I became a curator.

PON: What would you define as your first curatorial project?

MH: If I was to separate my teenage life from my more adult life, then the first project would be around 1992 when I was invited by the artist, writer and curator Gareth Jones to take part in a group exhibition called 'Making People Disappear' at Cubitt; an artist-run space in London. I was invited to participate as an artist, but one of my contributions to the show was to produce a publication with all of the other artists in the exhibition. It functioned not so much as a catalogue, but as a coda to the exhibition. It was produced in an edition of a hundred copies and distributed informally. For me that was, I guess, an attempt to unravel my identity as an artist, and it provided an opportunity to think about other ways that one might productively implicate oneself in the 'structure' of an exhibition. That idea was

repeated the following year in New York, for a group show at 303 Gallery called 'OK Behavior' (1993) jointly organised by Jones and Gavin Brown, who was then still active as an artist. Again I was invited to take part as an artist, and again I made a publication with the other artists involved in the show: which included Elizabeth Peyton, Gillian Wearing, and Doug Aitken amongst others. And in 1993 that would have been amongst the earliest published material by those artists. For me it was interesting to work on these publication projects within the context of exhibitions. Certainly it reminded me of my teenage years publishing a fanzine. When I eventually started my own publishing project *Imprint 93*, it seemed like a natural development. The motivation behind *Imprint 93* was modest: to publish and distribute, as cheaply as possible, new projects with artists whose work I found interesting. *Imprint 93* was self consciously influenced by many earlier strategies such as Fluxus, mail art, fanzines etc. However in the early 1990s in London very few people, at least of my generation, were producing and circulating work in this way. *Imprint 93* was connected to and inspired by the then important, and emerging, artist-led initiatives such as London's City Racing gallery, or Glasgow's Transmission Gallery, or artist collectives such as BANK. I was involved, initially somewhat peripherally, and then later more formally, with the artist-run studios and gallery Cubitt. It was there that I co-curated my first exhibition with Peter Doig. It was a show of Billy Childish' s paintings. At that time Billy Childish wasn' t particularly well known in the art world. He was a cult figure, but better known for his music and writing. Peter had studied with him briefly at St. Martins College in the early 1980s. We both shared an interest in this mercurial figure, whose work was, and remains, something of an anachronism. Billy obviously became much better known as his former partner, and longtime muse, Tracey Emin, became more widely known from the mid 1990s on, but around the time of our show Billy was a resolutely independent figure who had somehow retained an extraordinary sense of self-determination and independence: by the early 1990s had released in the region of fifty or sixty albums and published

twenty odd volumes of his poetry, but his prodigious output as artist - some several hundred paintings, and at least as many drawings - was largely unknown. I think, Peter and I saw the show as an opportunity to say something about our mutual interest in Billy Childish, whilst hopefully introducing Billy's art to a broader audience.

PON: Your practice has often shifted between being an artist and being a curator. Do you make a distinction between those activities, or do you see them as merging activities?

MH: I probably have less investment in myself as an artist than I do in other roles. In a way my art practice has become a somewhat reclusive activity, I don't show too often, which now largely emerges from my interest in both collecting books and spending time in bookshops. I am not entirely sure what I think of 'hyphenated' terms such as 'artist-curator', or 'artist-writer'. On the one hand I think the use of prefix of 'artist' in such terms does allow one to consider certain actions or approaches from a particular perspective. Again it is probably a somewhat romantic, and no doubt convoluted notion, but the idea of 'artistic license' does seem to infer that, as an artist, one can operate outside of convention or orthodoxy. And I guess, in some respects, being an 'artist-curator' allows one to interpret those categories from a particular perspective. Certainly I would consider some of the projects I've worked on with other artists as collaborations. Perhaps people who work within more traditionally institutional frameworks don't necessarily see publishing or organising exhibitions explicitly as 'collaborations', but then again maybe they do. For me the interest remains in trying to find appropriate and hopefully interesting responses to whatever circumstances one finds oneself in.

PON: What past curatorial models or exhibitions, historical precedents or precursors have been an influence on your practice as a curator/artist?

MH: All kinds of things; obviously the whole independent publishing movement that emerged in the aftermath of punk. The notion of a DIY culture that was tangible. There was something utopian about the years 1978, 1979, and 1980. There was a sense of liberation and a collective sense of 'permission'. Certain individuals and groups within that culture were, and remain important: Mark Perry of Alternative TV, Mayo Thompson, Scritti Politti, Mark E. Smith, Joy Division (and New Order), Throbbing Gristle ... I knew almost nothing about art until the age of 14 or 15, around 1980, when I started to come across independent art magazines like *ZG*, *Performance*, or *Artscribe*. In terms of curatorial models, I don't know if he has influenced me directly as such, but Kasper König has always struck me as an exemplary figure: you get such a palpable sense, from his exhibitions and publications, of his belief, and pleasure, in art and artists. Certainly Portikus, the exhibition space he founded in Frankfurt, remains one of the most compelling models for exhibition making: create a modestly scaled, ideal space for artists to work in, and provide them with the support they need to create often extraordinary things. I have never been that interested, on an emotional level, by exhibition models that seek, somehow, to subvert or unravel institutional frameworks. This is probably for any number of reasons. Perhaps such projects are simply too self-referential, too self-reflexive, too tautological, too academic, and perhaps are ultimately somewhat alienating: a kind of endgame, with increasingly diminishing returns.

PON: Are you talking specifically in relation to early or later forms of institutional critique that used the exhibition space as the means through which museum history, gallery practice or institutional policies were critiqued in some way?

MH: I think I'm increasingly interested in quite conventional approaches to exhibition making. Most of my favourite exhibitions have taken fairly conventional form i.e. they consist of interesting art displayed in a fairly traditional, or at least

straight-forward manner. Ultimately my interest is in the art, not in the structure or framework of the exhibition as such, which I accept can be of significant interest in-and-of-itself. However curators rarely create new approaches or methodologies for exhibition making, they simply adopt or adapt strategies developed by artists. Art changes exhibition making. I don't think the reverse is true, or at least I can't think of a compelling example. Over the past decade I think there's been an overt imposition of curatorial frameworks onto art which doesn't seem to have produced that many interesting results. I think as a curator your responsibility is to support the artist's intentions, to the best of your understanding, and not to create some torturous or convoluted framework in which the art is ultimately co-opted.

PON: You're not necessarily talking about particular shows, like Hans Haacke's 'Viewing Matters' (1996) or 'Play on The Unmentionable' (1992) by Joseph Kosuth?

MH: Not at all. Both of the exhibitions you cite were exhibitions determined entirely by artists. Each can be thought of as an extension or an amplification of those artist's respective approaches. They are both great examples of artists interrogating the exhibition as a model or form. I have no issues with artists seeking to unravel the logistics and legacies of institutions. (However such invitations to artists from institutions have become so commonplace that the impact of such projects seems, if not exactly compromised, then at least somewhat diminished.) I think when artists are creating the rules or parameters for such projects then we stand to gain a great deal. However when curators take on such roles, then I think we should, at least, be sceptical.

PON: When the curatorial structure, or the system of the display overrides the work?

MH: Exactly.

PON: Are you referring to certain structural or systemic approaches to exhibitions, for example projects by curators such as Hans Ulrich Obrist or Jens Hoffmann?

MH: Not specifically. On the one hand you could say that the emergence of these overt curatorial tendencies in the early nineties was born out of a necessity: to test or challenge things. And this may have been the case, but I think the reality was that the exhibitions themselves invariably tended to be very disappointing, so that the only thing you were left to think about was the structure or the mechanics of the exhibition: i.e. not the art it contained. In such circumstances you could argue that the work is at the service of the exhibition, not the other way round. My question would be: who is interested in such ideas? Other curators? However maybe it was specifically a condition of the mid to late 1990s? Certainly you see far less exhibitions these days, which privilege curatorial structures over and above the art.

PON: The generation of so called 'independent' curators associated with the mid to late 1990s such as, Maria Lind, Jens Hoffmann, Vasif Kortun, Nicolas Bourriaud or Hans Ulrich Obrist, and yourself, have moved towards institutional curating positions. How has such a move impacted upon or changed the way in which you deal with exhibition making, now you are the Director and Chief Curator at White Columns?

MH: Well I think I would have to establish that my institutional experience has been quite different from people like Maria Lind or Hans Ulrich Obrist, who from an early stage in their careers worked within very large public institutions. Between 1992 and 2000 I supported myself, and my curatorial projects, by either working full-time in an advertising agency, or later through teaching part-time. I've only had a regular salary as a curator since 2001, when I moved from the UK to the USA. So our experiences are, and remain very different. (However it is interesting that both Hans Ulrich and Maria have both recently

moved from much larger institutions to smaller ones.) I purposely have avoided working full-time within larger institutions. Virtually everyone I know who works in such places seems to spend half of their time in meetings. The scale of such institutions invariably requires a separation between the curatorial staff and a day-to-day engagement with one's audience or public. (At White Columns my office, which has no door, is next to the gallery's reception desk. Half the pleasure of the job is talking to people who come by the gallery.) Becoming the Director of White Columns - which was founded in 1970 by Jeffrey Lew and Gordon Matta-Clark and is New York's oldest alternative, artist-led art space - was, in many respects, a natural development, that relates back to my time ten or fifteen years ago working at places like Cubitt in London. White Columns is an artist-centric organisation. Its primary audience was, and remains, other artists. The whole field of artist-led, or artist-run organisations seems like incredibly fertile territory to be thinking about again, especially in an art world currently dominated by economics. I think we have an amazing opportunity to think about how to do things differently, and also to think about why you might want to do things differently, and to think about the kind of activities and ideas that both the commercial market and the larger institutions either have no interest in, or are unable to contextualise. White Columns' mandate, which hasn't changed since it was founded, is to support the work of both emerging and under acknowledged artists. Those two ideas have always interested me. I've always been interested in working with artists at an early stage in their career, just as I have always been interested in trying to establish cross-generational dialogues between those artists and artists of earlier generations. Also for me it was interesting to step outside of the British art scene which, on a personal level, felt extremely claustrophobic. I moved to California three and a half years ago and on a very basic level it was refreshing to have to re-calibrate one's ideas, and see how they might work in another context.

PON: Your practice in London was very localised, it moved from the specific to the general. How was the transition between working closely with artists associated with the art scene in London to working firstly in San Francisco and then New York?

MH: Well I think you know my primary interest in London was to specifically work locally. There was a kind of intensity to working locally, especially in the early to mid 1990s. In moving to Northern California, another locality with a much smaller art community, it was interesting simply because you had to re-set your radar. I had to learn a new 'dialect', I had to research and think about another 'art history'. It took me more than a year and a half in the Bay Area before I felt confident enough to make what I would characterise as a 'local exhibition', i.e. an exhibition that comprised works made in the Bay Area. For me it was important that I did an intensive, eighteen months worth of research around a quite narrow subject, which was Bay Area photography, in order to have the appropriate, or hopefully informed, conversations with the artists involved. Obviously I could never be an expert in the area's many art histories, but I felt that the discrepancy between my experience and interests in London, and a new opportunity to consider a mostly, to me at least, unknown situation would provide for an interesting conversation. And now that I am working in New York I would hope a similar dialogue might take place: I'm the first Director of White Columns not historically associated with the city, I'm the first non-American Director of the space ... and these distinctions alone seem to present an interesting platform from which to re-think what White Columns might be.

PON: Commercial gallerists in New York often talk about their exhibition programmes, a term usurped or appropriated from public institutional practice. Do you think this term is representative? Is it used in a coherent or relevant manner?

MH: No, not in all cases. I mean if you look at a gallery, say

for example, like Marian Goodman Gallery, then there's clearly an interesting and important programme. And now that a lot of the larger institutions have semi-abandoned contemporary art we are even more reliant on the intellectual and economic philanthropy of many commercial galleries to provide audiences with access to the most interesting contemporary art. I still find it astonishing that you can go, every six weeks or so, to several hundred commercial galleries in New York, free-of-charge, and potentially see something amazing. It is a strange kind of public philanthropy, and fairly unique, at least in the United States, where the doors are always open for anyone to walk in off the street and encounter often complicated ideas. It's kind of an anomaly in our society, where we are increasingly expected to pay for everything. Certainly if you think about the progressive and innovative commercial galleries of the late sixties and early seventies, spaces like Wide White Space in Antwerp, or Konrad Fischer's gallery in Düsseldorf then they were clearly establishing the territory for Minimalism, post-Minimalist, and Conceptual art practices that few, if any, institutions would have been interested in working with - without the pioneering support those artists received from what were fundamentally commercial galleries.

PON: Many of these galleries such as Konrad Fischer's or Wide White Space, or even Seth Siegelaub's, were never very successful commercially during their time in the 1960s-70s. There was an opportunity for experimentation during a period when such curators mainly focused on working with a small group of artists within a relatively small scene and their main ambition was keeping things going, maintaining what they had and continuing operations.

MH: Maybe, but the work was still presented under the auspices of a commercial enterprise. And because of their fiscal autonomy - regardless of whether they made a profit, they retained a degree of independence that a publicly-funded institution would probably never have had. Certainly few public institutions would have taken

such risks, at that time, on such progressive, and untested art. Also some of the people involved with the galleries we just mentioned were active at different times as artists, so their galleries were bound to have a different ambition, dynamic, or intention. This is one of the reasons why the idea of the artist-led space (whether it be a commercial gallery, or an institution like White Columns) remains such an interesting and compelling model to me. Those spaces seemed to emerge directly out of, and respond to, contemporary art practices, they were informed by, and helped shape those practices. This is the dynamic that we are currently trying to sustain and develop at White Columns.

PON: Do you think there is a certain 'amnesia' towards recent exhibitionary display practices of the past? For example, you curated 'City Racing 1988-98: A Partial Account' (2001) at the ICA, London which could be read as an attempt at re-positioning, historicising or making-visible such DIY artist-led initiatives in London from the early nineties. It could also be seen as a response to 'Life/ Live' at ARC Paris in 1996.

MH: With 'City Racing 1988-98: A Partial Account' at the ICA, which looked at certain activities presented at City Racing between '88 and '98, I think I wanted to, in a straight forward way, simply acknowledge that the story of British art in the nineties wasn't only determined or conditioned by the activities of the yBa i.e. Damien Hirst and other artists associated with Goldsmiths college, and later with the Saatchi collection. I read or understood City Racing as a kind of parallel history to the 'yBa'. There were obviously moments where these tendencies were intertwined, or overlapped, but I think for the most part they were quite distinct. I certainly gravitated more towards, and emphasised with, City Racing.

PON: Do you think 'Life/ Live' was a successful show in terms of how it dealt with such DIY practices? It did give City Racing and other UK artist-led initiatives their first big institutional

outing? In her essay 'Harnessing the Means of Production', Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt was suspicious of institutions that use the labour and attitude of artist-led initiatives as they themselves become assimilated into the establishment whilst bringing a certain level of visibility for both at the same time?

MH: I was involved with 'Life/ Live'. My project *Imprint 93* was invited to participate. I thought it was an extremely ambitious and ultimately very intelligent attempt to juxtapose several distinct tendencies in British art. I certainly thought Hans Ulrich's positioning of John Latham, Gustav Metzger, and David Medalla as artists who were important or influential on the then recent developments in British art was intriguing: because most younger British artists in the 1990s had never mentioned those artist's names in any context whatsoever. It was an interesting example of historical revisionism. But at the same time such a gesture functioned as a kind of historical 'correction', i.e. it signaled that the intellectual roots of British art were more complex than the standard art histories might have it, which I thought was interesting. City Racing was invited to participate too. They did two things: they installed the old 'City Racing' illuminated shop sign at the entrance to the exhibition, in a sly way co-opting the whole show as 'theirs', whilst simultaneously 'infiltrating' their identity into that of the museum. They also organised, in their allocated space, a group-show of artists who they were interested in. So instead of overtly celebrating themselves, they instead did what they had always done at the gallery in South London, which was to create opportunities for other artists. 'Life/Live', of all of those shows of British art that took place in the nineties, of which there were many, remains the most ambitious and inclusive. What would be interesting now would be to make an exhibition in the UK, in a major institution, such as Tate Britain, that reflected on that period, and to really privilege and articulate those artists and initiatives that were actually important and remain compelling.

PON: Do you think there are any interesting recent self-organised DIY artist/curator initiatives that have emerged since then, either in London or in the States?

MH: I appreciate that times change, but I certainly think in London one of the most disappointing things that happened was the way that the artist-led, and artist-run culture, for the most part, capitulated to the market. Where you might have had a number of independently-minded organisations or idiosyncratic initiatives, you have instead a plethora of new spaces employing exactly the same mannerisms and methodologies of commercial galleries, where the only tangible ambition appears to be a desire to be accepted into the fold of certain international art fairs. I appreciate that this is a generalisation, but I feel it is for the most part true. London lost a lot of energy towards the end of the 1990s, and given the cost of living in London, that energy was replaced by the more prosaic imperatives of the market ... one consequence of which was a tidal wave of third-rate, and possibly reactionary figurative art.

PON: During the last 15 years you have been practicing primarily within the contemporary art world, do you think there's been any dominant forms of curating that have developed during that time, or models that have emerged?

MH: Probably just the extent to which 'curating' is discussed or at least was discussed, as I'm not convinced too many people give much thought to it anymore (apart from other curators.) Curating wasn't widely, or publicly discussed when I was in my early twenties ... exhibitions just seemed to 'happen'. Of course art was discussed, and that discussion led to art changing, sometimes for the better. One could argue that the fact that exhibition-making is being discussed is, fundamentally, a good thing. But the real question would be: are exhibitions any better for more than a decade's worth of curatorial hand-wringing? I don't, of course, know the answer. But what does seem to be true is that there is

still only so much interesting art being made. (Probably no more, or no less, than there ever was.) If you read the art press you can see that there are increasingly more adverts for programs dedicated to Curatorial Studies ... and one wonders what they talk about all day. Because is there really that much to talk about? Maybe there is, I don't know. Certainly curating as a 'discipline' is still a relatively new area for discussion, so it is probably only right that someone, somewhere is thinking about the mechanics of exhibition-making and the culture of exhibitions.

PON: You've had a lot of involvement with these post-graduate curating training courses. Do you think it's something that can be learnt or something that can be taught?

MH: I think you can only encourage people to think for themselves. Certainly if you look at the careers of people who've been successful in this field - by that I mean people who have experienced some degree of visibility, acknowledgment, or I guess influence - then there tends to be evidence of an idiosyncratic viewpoint. This is why we are interested in people like König: i.e. they have a position, about which you can have your own opinions. But you can't teach someone to have an opinion or create a 'position' for themselves. Similarly you can't teach someone to be interested, or for that matter interesting.

PON: Are there particular curatorial projects that have played a major part in thinking about your own individual practice?

MH: Well Portikus obviously remains such a compelling and simple idea: create a great, modestly-scaled space; invite great artists; provide them with the support they need to realise the project; and then publish a catalogue, a substantial record for every project, so that other people, who couldn't see the shows, have access to the efforts and work involved. I'm sure it was always a struggle to find the funds to support such activities, which were hardy media friendly spectacles, but as an 'idea' Portikus remains

hard to beat, for both its simplicity and its cumulative complexity. You might also think of another König project like the 'Sculpture Project' in Münster, again a profoundly simple idea; take a German town, invite some interesting artists to make interesting public work, and to do it once every ten years. Such a brilliant investment in an idea over a long period of time which is counter to the short-termist attitudes that prevail in our current culture. You always get the sense that he is both very close to the artists and very close to the art and that is the thing that ultimately matters. There is never a sense of self-aggrandisement in these projects, the curatorial 'structure' is always straightforward ... what is allowed to shine is the art ...

PON: What makes a great art exhibition?

MH: Interesting work, intelligently and straightforwardly presented.

PON: Do you think we need any more international biennials?

MH: I'm all for the democratisation of art. The more people that have access to contemporary visual culture the better. Outside of the complicated civic and economic rationales for most biennials I think only a curmudgeon, or a snob, would argue that they are a bad thing. It doesn't mean or even matter that they are necessarily good exhibitions, what they do is provide a broader audience with access to contemporary visual culture/ideas. I would say the same about the rise in the number of international art fairs, which I'm also a big fan of. The juxtaposition of the carnivalesque and economic realities of the art world at such events seems very honest, and useful for all artists to deal with, and develop a relationship with ... and they provide a great opportunity for people who can't afford to travel internationally to see, first-hand, a lot of contemporary art in their own community ... which, again, is obviously a good thing. Are there as many biennials as there used to be?

PON: There are probably more. There were 80 listed in a recent special issue of *Contemporary* magazine dedicated to curating.

MH: Maybe you just don't hear about them as much, maybe through their proliferation they have less cumulative or even specific impact internationally. For example I always remember reading about the 'Sydney Biennial' in the 80s and early 90s, it seemed to be a really big deal. (I certainly could never have afforded to travel to Australia to see one at the time, in fact I probably still couldn't afford to travel there to see one now.) But several installments of that exhibition have passed without the same level of coverage, or impact. The degree of attention that's given to these things internationally has clearly diminished ... which in many respects is as it should be, because by their very nature biennials are in fact 'local' events, and I'm sure their true legacy is their impact on the communities in which they take place. The biggest problem I can see with biennials is that a rotating cast of the same two dozen or so people seem to have organised them all ... consequently they tend to feel the same, and often engage with a tightly defined narrative ... It is not difficult to see why the 2006 'Berlin Biennial', which stepped outside of the 'usual suspects' for its curators, has already received such positive word-of-mouth ...

END OF TAPE

JENS HOFFMANN

London, 11-08-04

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator? What is your curatorial background?

JENS HOFFMANN: I initially studied Theatre Directing and Drama Theory at the Performing Arts School in Berlin. It is quite a remarkable school; theater making is very much understood as a science there. Their approach was a combination of Stanislavski's acting methodology and Brecht's theory of drama, which forms a theater of realism I was not particularly interested in. It was in my opinion hopelessly anachronistic. My main fields of interest were the theater movements of the 1920s and their legacy, particularly the development of avant-garde theater in the US in the 1960s and 70s with its close ties to the fields of dance and visual art. I was not at all interested in character development and acting but rather in the overall theoretical and philosophical notion of theater.

In the mid-1990s I decided that I wanted to extend my knowledge of visual art and do something different, yet related, and went to work with Kasper König at the Portikus Kunsthalle. I had heard of his legendary exhibitions 'Von hier aus' and 'Westkunst', knew their publications and had seen many of the amazing solo exhibitions he organised at the Portikus that I used to visit while still a student in high-school. König was a fascinating character; he seemed to me a curator who was closer to my idea of a director, a form of creator, than most of the theater directors I knew. I soon became keen on the idea of becoming a curator as a form of theater director who would work beyond the sphere of the classic proscenium theater, without following a script, directing plays that would last weeks and would involve the audience much stronger, etc.

While at the Portikus I made my first steps in the visual art world and I only later realised where I had actually arrived. I stayed for three exhibitions, Andreas Gursky, Wolfgang Tillmans and Boris Mikhailov and immersed myself completely into this new environment. But in the back of my head was still my fascination for theater, an interdisciplinary notion of theater as a fusion of dance, acting and visual arts and I was looking for another place to make experiences. I went to New York and worked at the DIA Center, which at that point still had a very strong dance programme. I worked with Lynne Cooke for

about a year. I learned an enormous amount from working at DIA, especially about the way US institutions function and also helped her working on the 10th 'Sydney Biennial'. Those years were an intense learning experience.

Due to my experiences with theater and visual arts I got a call from a friend, Tom Stromberg, with whom I had worked during my studies at the legendary Theater Am Turm in Frankfurt, asking me if I wanted to organise the theater program for 'Documenta X' together with him. At this point I had moved to Amsterdam to finish my studies at an interdisciplinary theater school called DasArts - School for Advanced Research in Theater and Dance Studies and was commuting between there and New York where I was still working at DIA. Holland and Flanders were the place to be in the mid and late 1990s in regard to new notions of theater and dance which was mainly a result of the person who started the school in Amsterdam, Ritsaert ten Cate. He ran a theater called Mickery in Amsterdam from the 1970s on that brought all the theater people from New York to Europe. People like Merce Cunningham, Richard Foreman, the Wooster Group, Robert Wilson, Peter Sellers, everyone around the Judson Dance Theater, Richard Schechner, and many more. This had a tremendous influence on the development of theater in that region and I think it is fair to say that as a result people like Jan Fabre, Jan Lauwers, Rosas, Michele Laub emerged as the theater vanguard of the 1990s.

The theater program for 'Documenta X' was very much informed by that and included Jan Lauwers for example but it was already looking ahead at the next generation and included artists such as Stefan Pucher and Meg Stuart who since then became household names in the world of theater and choreography. We invited in total about ten theatre makers and choreographers to each conceive a new piece of 15 minutes and all of the works were performed on one night, one after the other at different locations throughout the city of Kassel. No one of course did only 15 minutes and the program became a total artwork of about 8 hours starting at 8pm and lasting till the early hours of the next morning. It was an incredible experience and an amazing possibility for me as I spent the whole summer in Kassel working on the theater programme that was presented at the very end of 'Documenta X'. Everyday I went into the exhibition and spoke to Catherine David about

her ideas around the show, etc. This experience really made me more and more curious about the art context. It was like a crash course in contemporary art, art history and theory.

PON: This was your first experience of curating within an art context?

JH: It was my first experience of curating in the art context in as much as our theater program was part of the overall exhibition of David. Yet, the theater program, which was by the way titled 'Theater Notes', was a collaborative effort of Tom Stromberg and me as well as the team of 'Documenta X'. Stromberg continued to work in the field of theater. He came from a theater family after all. My practice was about to go into a totally different direction after that. I moved on to organise the 1st 'Berlin Biennial' the following year.

PON: How would you describe your practice?

JH: I would describe it as something, which has been tremendously influenced by my experience and my knowledge of theatre. It is the idea of the world as a stage: something that is fluid and temporary, constantly changing, evolving, unpredictable and in continuous progress. I am interested in a concept of curating as directing, the exhibition as a play and the play as an exhibition. It is the idea of the curator having a role in the set-up of an exhibition that is similar to the one of a director in the set-up of a theatre play. This also means I am often collaborating and have a close relationship with the artists. One person has the overall vision and keeps it altogether but it is a team effort. What is key to my understanding of curating is that I see the curator as that person having the vision, the artists join in with their individual contributions. I talk about this in my text 'A Certain Tendency In Curating' which is based on François Truffaut's theory of the author in the field of film and translates that into the field of the arts.

In general I think my desire for all of this comes from feeling an obligation to question the world, trying to understand what holds it together, overcoming the absurdity that there may not be any real meaning at all, trying to be critical, subversive and provocative. The art world used to be the place for all of this, before it became such

an overly commercial, affirmative affair. Consequently I have an affinity for artistic practices that deal with those matters and are radical in their desire to be disruptive, whether it is the avant-garde movements of the early twentieth-century, Conceptual art or Institutional Critique, etc.

My main objective is to foster a diversity of exhibition models, to find alternatives for the common ways of organising exhibitions and to unleash the creative and artistic potential of exhibitions. I believe we have only seen a glimpse of the potential of exhibitions. The best is yet to come!

PON: There appears to be in your practice to date an interest in structures, and the idea of exhibitions as being a setting for a particular staged activity, does this stem from your background in theatre?

JH: I think the exhibition that has been most preoccupied with this was 'Artists' Favorites' at the ICA. It was an exhibition in two acts, like *Waiting for Godot* is a play in two acts. And both are essentially about the same thing. It included a lot of theatrical elements: a cast of characters, a playbill, a stage design, theatrical lighting, etc. In general I am very interested in exhibition design, the actual installation, exhibition architecture and the lighting, in other words the staging of the exhibition. It is one of the main concerns in my practice. I spend most of my time working on this once the decision is made what works will be presented. It goes as far as the invitation card, the wall labels, etc. it is all part of the staging of a show and it all has to be in tune with the idea for the show and be consistent.

PON: Do you think dominant forms of curatorial practice have developed over the last 15-20 years?

JH: In general we can probably divide the camps between independent curators (this also includes curators in institutions who have worked mainly independently before and continue with a similar spirit) and institutional curators that you find mainly in big museums, especially in the US where there is almost no independent curating at all. Yet,

if we look closely it becomes more complicated. The main problem is that there is a tendency to generalise approaches to curating that are outside of the mainstream, that are looking for different formats and ways of organising exhibitions. While there are affinities, links and connections between some of the curators who have gone down that road there are also very big differences.

Most independent curators are independent simply because they cannot find a job in an institution and not because they believe in the sprit of being independent in the true sense of the word. If I look at the younger generation of curators I see almost only people who are keen on getting into institutions. And who can blame them, I worked as an independent curator for most of my career and it was a horror. No one ever pays you and jobs are rare. One has to have an almost existential relationship to this profession in order to survive being an independent curator for so many years. Financially it was a disaster and I had to do about 15 things at the same time. It is not something everyone wants to do and should do. In general I am not advocating a particular style or method of curating, I am interested in diversity and the largest number of approaches possible. This means I have tremendous respect for curators that work very differently from me and do a good job. Consequently it is very difficult to talk about dominant forms of curating. When you look at the individual curators many have started to develop a form of signature style that is easily recognisable and this brings us back to my idea of the curator as an author.

Looking at my own practice and trying to find a label for it I would probably call it creative curating. Ultimately there are not many people who curate the way I do, which is of course also due to my particular formation and interests but also the result of a style I have developed. I have been compared to curators like Hans Ulrich Obrist again and again, yet looking closer at what we do you can easily see that our approaches are rather different. Obrist's approach is, to over simplify it, about the idea of allowing exhibitions to develop in a natural way, making links and connections that become a wide web of possibilities, while my work is about very controlled creation. I always have the result more or less in my head while Obrist as a matter of principal lets his shows grow on their own

without too much interference. From my point of view he is by far the most significant curator that has ever worked. He is single-handedly responsible for the change in curatorial practice over the last 15 years. He is a true visionary, a true believer and one of the most extraordinary people I have ever met. His contribution to the field of curating cannot be overestimated, no one comes close to him. What we share is the urge to challenge standards and the desire to constantly rethink our practice, our actions, etc. so there are parallels. But ultimately our shows and what they try to say are quite different.

One thing I should maybe mention here is a tendency in curating that is inspired by conceptual art: its methods and strategies. Here I fit in very well with someone like Maria Lind. Yet, while she has utilised ideas coming from the sphere of institutional critique I have been interested in the concept of exhibition making and looked at the conditions and the fundamental parameters of exhibitions that became more and more the conceptual material for my curatorial work. What those utilisations of artistic strategies by curators have created, is often a closer relationship between artists and curators and a more visible involvement of artists in curatorial practice. This is a significant shift in my opinion.

All in all we have seen an emancipation of curating over the last 20 years from the curator being simply a facilitator to the curator being more and more a creator. Despite what I said earlier, this has also had an effect on institutional curating as even in the larger museums things are starting to change.

PON: You mentioned Kasper König and Catherine David already, but what other past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents, or precursors have been an influence on your practice to date?

JH: This is interesting, neither König nor David are very close to my ideas of curating but as I said before, I respect them for the work they do and the way they do it. Someone else I admire is Lynne Cooke who is obviously a very institutional curator but what she does at DIA she does extremely well. There are other people I respect tremendously for what they do as curators: Adriano Pedrosa, Carlos Basulado, Mary Jane Jacob, Francesco Bonami, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Maria Lind, Maria

Hlavajova, Hou Hanru, Eric Troncy and many more. There is of course the whole lineage of European curators in the 1960s and 70s such as Pontus Hulten, Harald Szeemann, Johannes Kladers, etc. that were extremely important. But I always gained the most out of talking to artists about my profession, they were the ones that gave me the best advice, especially people like John Baldessari, Martha Rosler, Michael Asher, Joan Jonas or Daniel Buren. There are an endless amount of shows that I could mention in terms of influences. Just in terms of group shows: 'Places with a Past', 'Sonsbeek 93', 'Whitney Biennial 93', 'Magicians de la Terre', 'Documenta X', 'Documenta 11', 'Cities on the Move', 'Laboratorium', the 1998 'Sao Paulo Biennial', 'The Short Century', the 1996 'Johannesburg Biennial', 'What If', and many others. The 1990s were the most amazing decade for exhibition making. It was before biennials were a dime-a-dozen and museums still had resources to set up large-scale group exhibitions of contemporary art.

PON: One of the things that seem to be common between you and these people is how the role of exhibition making and curating as historically produced and as a self-reflective practice, which could not ultimately be said of all curators?

JH: I would agree.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past, in particular the laboratory years from 1920s-50s and the curatorial role played by people such as Alexander Dorner, Frederick Kiesler, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, Lilly Reich, Alfred H. Barr etc. Do you think this amnesia has affected the way we perceive contemporary art curating or the contemporary art curator?

JH: I think that everyone in the field of curating is aware of the book you just mentioned. It is a standard in terms of exhibition design and ideas of display. But I understand your question. I am very interested in the history of exhibitions and I am currently working on a book that will look at exemplary exhibitions of the last 20 years. I suppose there will be more and more material available over the next years in regards to the history of curating and exhibition making.

What this amnesia has caused is that people talk about curating in very general terms. People like Dorner or Szeemann are always pulled out if one is in need for a historical figure with regard to the current forms of curating. Szeemann was not at all interested in being massively self-reflexive about his own practice or curating in general and Dorner is a very difficult case in my opinion. There is just so little known about his work and yet people always refer to him as a pioneer of curating. Everyone who has read *The Way Beyond Art* knows that this is not really the case.

PON: There are also people like Wilhelm Sandberg, who was the innovative Director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in the 1940-50s and there is hardly anything published in English on his practice?

JH: There is hardly anything published on his practice and the practice of many other curators of that time. I fear that this is the result of very little interest from the side of curators in the contributions of Sandberg and curators of an early era. I wonder though if there is much to find. I think what is even worse than this is that today people already do not remember curators from the early 1990s that, for some reason or the other, have not had that much visibility over the recent years but did groundbreaking shows only ten to fifteen years ago. Do you remember Bart de Baere? He is now the Director of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Antwerp. I have no idea what shows he has done lately but his 'This Is The Show And The Show Is Many Things' was the start of a new era in curating in the early 1990s, that was a radical and groundbreaking show. Or take someone like Mary Jane Jacob, 'Culture in Action' was a paradigm shift for art in the public sphere. I know she is still doing extremely interesting exhibitions but the mainstream does not seem to be interested in it and younger generations do not know about her. There are many more people like this. It goes very fast and it is sometimes also the fault of the curators themselves. Many in fact just disappear into the anonymity of institutions once they land a job at a museum, others that are involuntary independent do not find the institutional job they are looking for while not continuing to work independently since it is not prestigious enough.

PON: What current curatorial projects or initiatives do you think are

breaking new ground?

JH: The main shift I have perceived over the last 3-4 years is that many of the independent working curators have finally moved into institutions and that there is a form of new institutionalism. This is however a totally European phenomenon. I think the emancipation of curating reached its end with Bonami's 'Venice Biennale' in 2003. It was a celebration of diversity in curating in my opinion with various effects. People got tired of curators and their visions and group shows as an exhibition format became less and less popular. I consider group shows as the curator's main playing field so there was a problem. Yet, at the same time institutions opened up for these curators since the curators also moved more and more away from the notion of independent curating as developed in the 1990s they wanted to be the directors of institutions because of the knowledge that there was more at stake there, that there was a different responsibility, which would give them a new and maybe more mature challenge. And as I said before, working in an institution would also give you a form of financial stability that independent curators do not always have.

PON: Do you think that this re-evaluation of institutions from the inside by curators is becoming almost like the next step in recent curatorial history, when you look at people like Charles Esche who shifted from being committed to being independent and now is very much becoming an institutional kind of curator at the Van Abbe museum in Eindhoven, but with a difference. Or of you look at Adam Szymczyk from Foksal Gallery, Warsaw who has just taken over the Kunsthalle Basel. Institutions need independent curators, but now independent curators are crossing over into being part of the institution, what kind of an impact will this have?

JH: It is the next step of a natural evolution. Even the most conservative institutions have by now understood that there are different forms of curating than what they were traditionally producing, and many of them are allowing curators to come in and do exhibitions, which are different from what traditionally happened there. But do not forget, many independent curators were simply independent because they did not get a position in an institution. One

can make a career in an institution, as an independent curator one make a career only with a lot of difficulties. Independent curating worked and works, for example, financially only for a handful of curators and it takes years to build up a network that would allow you to make a serious living as an independent curator and operate like Rosa Martinez for example. She is a total exception. Most of them either write and teach as well or are consultants for collections in order to have steady streams of income. The era of the 1990s independent curator as so quintessentially personified by Obrist or Martinez came to an end over the last few years. Venice in 2003 was the grand finale.

So far we have seen only the beginning of this trend. Charles Esche is probably the person who has most advanced in all of this from being an independent curator to the directorship of one of Europe's most prestigious museums. There will be more independent curators that in the future will take over major museums not only smaller organisations like the ICA. I am very ambivalent about this trend and think that there are actually many reasons that speak for working as an independent curator and I suspect, believe it or not, that this will sooner or later be what I will do again. Institutions are the killer of creativity and the bigger they are the less one is in control of one's own creation. We all know the priorities of those museums, audience figures and fundraising, so it will not come as a surprise to you that exhibitions can never be that radical and that one, as a curator, has no saying in what I would understand as quintessential parts of my profession. It goes as far as not being able to choose the title of your own show as that is often decided by the PR and marketing department.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making, how do you see your role as a curator and at what level of the artistic production do you see your practice being involved within the process of art-making and what is the nature of the collaboration?

JH: It depends completely on the exhibition and the artists you are working with. I would say that I am normally very involved and artists like that involvement, they can share some of the ideas but also the

pressure and know that there is someone they can trust. I would not be involved to the level that I am if the artists would not like it. But I think all of this has also to do with particular exhibition formats. A solo exhibition of an artist that includes new work is always a collaboration between the artist and the curator. If one is to do a thematic group exhibition it is very similar, producing new work or selecting the right piece for a show. It is always a dialogue, an exchange of ideas. I see no limits of how far this can go. It also happens the other way around, I have used ideas that artists gave me for my exhibitions. Artists talk to me about their work and ask for advice and I talk to them about my work and ask for advice.

PON: The term 'performative curating' has often been used to describe a self-reflexive practice associated with yourself and a group of contemporary euro-curators such as yourself, Hans Ulrich Obrist, Maria Lind, Nicolas Bourriaud to a certain extent etc. Is this a term you are comfortable with in terms of defining what you do?

JH: I think that the term per-formative has been widely overused and also misused. It seems to simply be just a fashionable word to describe a notion of process, audience relation, change, fluidity and development. If we go back to John Austin's speech-act theory we see that the term originated in a very different sphere and has been used in a less and less specific sense over the last years. I would not be able to tell you what 'per-formative curating' is other than a form of curating that seems close to the practice of artists favoring process oriented and relational forms of art, artists that come to my mind are Rirkirt Tiravanija, Carsten Höller, maybe Liam Gillick.

PON:: A key word used by Seth Siegelaub to clarify the changing role as a curator in the late sixties was 'demystification'. How relevant do you think this term is to evaluating contemporary curatorial practice?

JH: I like the idea of demystification in terms of making things more transparent and accessible. Yet, I would doubt that there was a form of myth around the role of the curator in the 1960s that needed to be demystified. Maybe the attention that curating got over the last year helped people to understand what we actually do but it also created

complications because no one made the effort to look at it in more detail to understand the differences in the various approaches.

PON: At a recent curating conference that I was involved in Belgrade, one of the questions that was raised was that there are certain curators who go shopping for art when they travel, and there were curators there who completely disowned that as a concept of curating in practice. Do you think the idea of the curator, as a consumer of the culture of others is true?

JH: Not necessarily. I would not call it shopping I would call it research. I like to be informed about what goes on around the world in terms of the production of art and can never stand still. I have been travelling around the globe and looked at art, and made studio visits in all four corners of this world and these journeys have deeply influenced and formed me. I am doing them as much as I can. In terms of your question about being the consumers of others' cultures I can just say that curating just as art emerges out of a conscious confrontation with itself and its history. By confronting, questioning and examining the standards of the past and present, curating interpolates itself into a discourse and tradition in which individual difference also arises out of strategies of reading, recognising and transforming other models into something else and new.

I think the idea of shopping refers to experiences many artists make with some curators who tried them like a disposable razor. They invite an artist to a show and once the show is up the artist never hears from the curator again. I can understand that this is frustrating for an artist, who does not want to be simply a prop in the hand of curators who make a career out of discovering the 'hottest' young artist from Eastern Europe. Unfortunately, 'Manifesta', and its particular curatorial process, were often based on this way of working and researching. But in all fairness it was 'Manifesta', and specially the first three versions, that really brought Eastern Europe closer to the Western countries.

PON: Do you think a 'curated exhibition' can be a work of art in itself? Why?

JH: Yes I do. I see curating as a creative and artistic practice. I understand all the exhibitions I organise and curate as a manifestation and a result of my own personal creative vision. In this way I can call them a work of art but this does not mean that I appropriate artworks to simply illustrate my vision. It is a form of co-authorship where the outcome is bigger than the simple sum of its parts and the works on view. Curating understood like this is so much more than only selecting and installing artworks, so much more then coming up with an idea for an exhibition and writing an essay about it, it is a very, very complex endeavor. I organised an exhibition in Rio de Janeiro around this question in 2003; it was called 'The Exhibition As A Work Of Art'.

Exhibitions that qualify as works of art are most often shows that are curated by artists and which function as an extension of their artistic practice. Think about all the shows in the late 1980s and early 1990s curated by artists such as Martha Rosler, Hans Haacke, Group Material, Joseph Kostuh or Fred Wilson among many others.

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is? How would you describe a 'good' curated art exhibition?

JH: I could write a whole book as an answer to this question and would probably still come to the same conclusion as I come now. As an immediate response one would probably say a good exhibition is a show that includes a lot of good artworks. But we all know that this is not it. There is no recipe for curating as there is no recipe for making art. One cannot learn to have a vision, to be sensitive and curious, etc.

PON: Many of your projects such as 'Institution^2' at KIASMA or 'A Show That Will Show That A Show Is Not Only A Show' at The Project in Los Angeles, or 'Exhibitions of an Exhibition' in New York, used exhibition strategies to question the role of the curator within exhibition making, but they also made your position more overly apparent, were these shows one way of making your place within the overall project more visible?

JH: I would not say that I wanted to make my role or position more

apparent but I certainly wanted to talk about curating and exhibitions. The main intention was to look at all these shows as exercises and to understand some of the principles of exhibition making in order to embark onto something else that might lie further ahead. It was a reflection on what is taking place right now in regards to exhibitions, institutions and curators.

PON: Were they a critique of curatorial practice?

JH: They were a critique of a certain form of curatorial practice. 'A Show That Will Show That A Show Is Not Only A Show' was a reflection on the idea of long term exhibition planning as I had experienced it when working at the Guggenheim or DIA where you have to programme three years in advance. For this show I did not even programme one minute in advance. I just started with an empty gallery and for four months I put together a show that was based on my daily research in Los Angeles. The show would grow and grow, day by day. All of this has ultimately to do with conceptualising the idea of exhibition making, similar to conceptualising the concept of art. In all my exhibitions one can find this link to the strategies of institutional critique as well as to conceptual art, but without it being too apparent.

PON: Which of your projects do you think has been most significant in expanding the parameters of the role of the contemporary art curator?

JH: I am not sure. I hope all. If I have to answer immediately probably 'The Show Must Go On', 'The Sixth Caribbean Biennial', 'A Show That Will Show That A Show Is Not Only A Show', 'The Exhibition As A Work of Art' and 'Artists' Favorites'.

PON: Both 'Artists' Favorites' shown at the ICA and your recent project *The Next Documenta Should be Curated By an Artist* emphasised the role of the artist within contemporary curatorial practice, is this something that you think is necessary at the moment?

JH: Yes, I think it is necessary for various reasons.

There is a continuous stream of critique coming from artists about the increasing importance of curators. This is something I address with

The Next Documenta Should be Curated By an Artist.

The influence of artistic practice on the practice of curating is enormous and needs to be acknowledged. This is what I have been trying to do with 'Artists' Favorites' to a certain degree but also with inviting artists to curate at the ICA.

PON: Do you think that these projects have succeeded in, to quote you, 'putting the artist back in the driving seat'?

JH: I like the idea of the artist in the driving seat because artists are more willing to take risks than many curators. The show John Bock curated for the ICA was the hard proof of that. It was something no curator could ever do and it was a step forward in respect to how this show blurred and collapsed the borders between group exhibition and solo exhibition. It was fascinating from my point of view and 'hell of a ride'. I think we almost crashed with the show since Bock was simply ignoring all the unwritten rules of how to install a show but it created an energy in the show that was unprecedented I think.

PON: Do you think the 'next Documenta should be curated by an artist?'

JH: It would be an interesting change! But my book was less about the actual reality of an artist curating 'Documenta'. It was about opening up a debate around the relationship of curators and artists, particularly in the set-up of a large-scale international group exhibition.

PON: In the last 15-20 years there has been an unprecedented interest in what is contemporary art curating. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during this period?

JH: We already spoke about my theory in regards to the emancipation of curators from facilitator to creators. This is the main shift. I remember, an interview that I did with Harald Szeemann a couple of years ago, where he was saying that when he was my age in his early thirties and he started doing his exhibitions, his name would only appear in the back of the catalogue, simply with the credits like everyone else who worked on a show. This has completely changed;

people now even want to know who the curators behind shows are to properly understand them. Maybe curators in the past wanted to be artists and be part of whatever it entailed to be an artist, some form of glamour and attention, etc. As a result they are more present and as a consequence they also became commodities. Szeemann was an enormous commodity in the later years of his life, Obrist has his own brand 'HUO' and Martinez is asked to do one biennial after the other.

PON: It's interesting when you look at someone like Seth Siegelaub, when he was curating in the late sixties, he never used the term curator to define what he did, he called himself an art dealer, organiser, a gallerist and so on, but never the term curator. The term curator meant a very different thing back then, more associated with museums and institutions.

JH: Yes, exactly curators were basically custodians of collections, art historians, not the creative individuals that they are today.

PON: When you were asked recently by Polly Staple in *Frieze*, whether or not curating could be taught your answer was no. So do you think we need more post-graduate curating courses and institutionally-led curatorial training programmes such as De Appel, in Amsterdam or others such as Le Magasin, Grenoble or The Whitney Independent Study Programme, or The Royal College of Art & Design, London or Bard College of Art and Design, New York and many others?

JH: I do not think curating can be taught but these courses can teach a lot of other elements that can be useful for a curator. Whether that is exhibition history, art theory, exhibition design, or more practical things as simple as how to fill out loan-forms, condition checking of a work of art, etc. But you are right there are plenty now, producing more curators than one actually needs. Curating became so fashionable over the last years and the schools are also cashing in on all those students who pay fees to enroll in these courses. To this day I am waiting for the curator who comes out of a course like this and really radically shifts things around. No one we have mentioned in this conversation went to a curating school. Then again they are rather new so there is hope!

PON: Have you had much involvement with such courses?

JH: Yes I have been involved quite a lot. I suppose I have been to all the courses that exist around the globe at one point or another to give lectures and to talk to the students about my shows and my curatorial philosophy. Interestingly enough, no course is like the other and it is interesting to see how courses in the US are much more academic and how they are less and less formal here in Europe. Right now I am on the faculty of the curatorial program of Goldsmiths College, University of London. I think once the hype around curating calms down many of those courses will disappear again. I could never imagine to have started my career in such a way. It is also a false promise most people graduating from those courses do not become curators. They do other administrative jobs in the art world or drop out completely.

PON: If there were a show to be called 'Curators' Favourites', where curators were to select their favourite exhibition, what would your favourite be?

JH: I think it would be 'Do It'. The idea behind the exhibition (artists write instructions for the fabrication of an artwork that is than made by the public and exhibited) is very simple and yet it is an enormously complex exhibition. I think it is one of the smartest shows ever done.

PON: Do we need any more biennials?

JH: I think I answered that question with 'The Sixth Caribbean Biennial'. The exhibition, which I co-curated with Maurizio Cattelan in 1999, disordered most parameters of a show. Not only did no exhibition ever take place it was essentially a critique aimed at the boom of biennials in the 1990s set up by an artist and a curator. Somehow also a parody of institutional critique as we selected the ten artists that had most frequently participated in biennials during the 1990s and brought them together on a little Caribbean island for a week of holiday after having done the usual marketing and promotion campaign generally associated with a biennial. We placed large-scale advertisements announcing the Biennial in the most widely distributed

art magazines, sent out invitation cards and press releases, formed a board of directors and even appointed a president of the Biennial. Obviously all of this was false, apart from the two curators and the artists actually traveling to the island for a week.

PON: What did you do during that week?

JH: It was basically a week of holiday.

PON: How important is the role of criticism to your practice as a curator? This is a deliberately open-ended question.

JH: I think it is less and less important. Criticism in England is a joke when you look at the daily newspapers which leaves you with what the art magazines write which I think goes pretty much unnoticed.

PON: Do you think many potential critics have become curators instead?

JH: What you see more and more is this form of multitasking; artists and curators become critics while also working in a commercial gallery, etc. It is a very UK phenomenon though.

PON: What did you mean when you said that 'an institution has to change what one expects of it?'

JH: This refers to a Seth Siegelaub's quote 'Art has to change what one expects of it'. It simply means not to fulfill expectations, not other's as well as your own, and to try to continuously reinvent oneself.

PON: Seth Siegelaub said in an interview I did with him recently that it is the institutions who now need independent curators for their programmes, because curators who were independent are now working for institutions and do not have the time to even consider curatorial practice as an independent activity.

JH: I am not sure if I agree with this. Institutions are only interested in independent curators as a commodity. The ICA has brought me to London because of what I signify as a curator on a rather

superficial level, radicalism, experimentation, the reputation of doing shows outside the usual formats, etc. but not as something that could be potentially really subversive. Little do they know!

PON: How would you describe your current activities?

JH: I am an institutional curator but far from being an institutionalised curator. I keep my exhibition projects outside the ICA going so I am in-between chairs. I am independent here and institutional there.

END OF TAPE

HOU HANRU

Paris, 26-01-04

PAUL O'NEILL: As a curator you operate mainly between the individual and the collective, between the local and the global?

HOU HANRU: I am kind of used to it. Lately I have been talking to different people about it. I think that we have to look at the big picture, because art itself is going through a fundamental change in the last couple of decades. It has become an activity going far beyond individual expression. It is also a show business, a kind of industry. In between this we are looking for a voice from outside the mainstream, but in the meantime we have to operate within its networks of communication. So it happens that there is a necessity to have people who play abroad, which is not producing the work, a kind of doing a very complex iteration. At the same time it is a kind of mirror, setting up people who are supposed to produce, mainly the artist and also to the public who look at art. That creates a very complex role, which is kind of being in between things.

PON: Where do you see your role as a curator within this space of reflection and transformability?

HH: I think this is mainly how I consider what my job is. At first I don't deny that I have a personal decision. I don't deny that I have quite an active idea about artistic expression. And through my artistic concerns, I am thinking, writing, criticising or presenting ideas about the work and society in general. So in a way working with that is about producing exhibitions, producing discourses around the artworks. It is a way to express oneself. I don't want to deny this active side of the work. I am a normal person who wants to express his own opinion about things but in the meantime when it comes to working with the artist you always put yourself into a secondary position, which is kind of servicing, but it is also stimulating the situation. You serve the artist, but you are also a mirror, sort of reflecting or interactively engaging with what the artist thinks and says about their work, so in a way it is a complex thing. Of course, curating has a very historical link with paradigmatic exhibitions. So our job, in a great way, is to invent new paradigms, new ways of presenting artworks. This is not about newness but about necessity, because every model of representation has a very straightforward link with ideology, or a kind of idea of the position of art in the public

space. Then it relates to the function of art. Most of the time people take it for granted that art today has its own system, its own world of existence and it doesn't have to be related to real life, even its discourse, but we still have to have a very specific space to protect, as pure as possible, to protect this expression, because it has its own system of valuation, its own language, its own discourses and all the things should remain somehow separate from other things. So it can be a more free space for expressions of ideas.

PON: With the exhibition layout of both 'Z.O.U/ Zone of Urgency' at the 'Venice Biennale' 2003, and the ongoing 'Cities on the Move' curated with Hans Ulrich Obrist, there was an obvious strategy to create a spatial experience akin to that of the city, was this a conscious decision when you were thinking through the exhibition design?

HH: Yes, to real life in the city. On the surface, of course it has to do with the design of the space, but fundamentally I am also in the process of working through, over the last ten years or so, how to continuously redefine what we call art in the real context, in the context of real life. And in that case design is by necessity, which is a particular design reminding us of the city. It is a particular way to articulate this relationship between art and everyday life, and especially learning from the complexities, the dynamics, and the excitement of urban life that art should actually take the challenge to deconstruct itself and reinvent its own role in the much wider public space. This actually pushes us to think about the nature of artistic activity.

PON: Do you see the activity of the curator as being parallel to artistic production within this reinvented context?

HH: In parallel as an independent person who thinks but merged in the process of working. Art is no longer an independent expression, it is part of the communication chain but in the meantime it is a very particular way of communicating which is more like a negotiation between different positions. Rather than try to make people understand what you say, so in that process what is important is to

open up to very different kinds of opinions and to keep everyone open to new possibilities. To achieve this you have to merge with the others so in a way it is more like a field of negotiations or in a more traditional term it is a playground or a laboratory of thinking.

PON: If art is as much about the role of art as it is about the world, does the activity of curating say as much about the cultural position of the curator as it does about the artwork on public display?

HH: I think there are two things. There is a kind of a technical aspect to it, which is creating a curatorial model or trying to experiment and invent another way, a new language of presenting art. But in my position it is about shifting from representation to presenting, shifting from representing something existing to making a space for a process of creation to be present. Maybe it is a Sartrean kind of existentialism, idea about the present, about existence, about creating a kind of design. But, of course, I would say it is a way to redefine art by making its own design. I don't see myself as a Heideggarian subject, which for me is to do with a lack. I am more into an imaginary kind of world. It's much more about utopian spaces instead of the land. Probably it has to do with the energetic existence. We generate something out of this process of making this thing present. This is more a technical model than what I see myself doing. Historically it has to do with two things. One is my personal background. I grew up with a generation of artists who actually developed everything out of the street. It's a kind of political statement in an avant-garde climate twenty years ago in China. When I moved to Paris, I became quite naturally involved in the tendency towards post-colonial discourse, actions and critiques, being someone who was coming from another culture, from a kind of post-colonial context. I do see how important this alternative is, absolutely important when we look at how the Western centre is being changed into something else, how the process of globalisation is actually generating very different ideas about modernisation, about modernity, modern society and culture. These things push me to constantly position myself from the street, from the city, from where this tension happens. The street is a metaphor, a battlefield. Another thing is that it pushes me to rethink the mainstream history of art,

which is very symbolically concentrated and materialised within certain models of representation, from the linear history of modern art to today, to how the thing disposes this effect of being presented within museum spaces, which is mainly in the white cube system, proclaimed for the autonomy of art activities. How this is conditioning very strongly, the existence of art itself, and how this thing is being brought to other parts of the world to become the model of being artistic.

PON: It seems that you are both a missionary and an advocate of the kind of artists that you grew up with in China, which is evident in your willingness to bring these practices to a wider international context outside of their origins. There is also the idea of the street as a quite playful aspect within your exhibition designs. How do you think this representation of both China and 'the street' translates, or transports itself into the context of somewhere like the 'Venice Biennale'?

HH: This has probably been the main thing that I have been doing in the last two decades. I firmly believe in the tension between being completely global and the necessity of being different. This is an interesting tension of how to articulate this tension, which is probably through the individual aspect of each artist, especially the individual struggle for imagination or language, or freedom. I mean in the absolute sense it is not only about facing a political situation, it is also about a philosophical or ideological condition that one looks for a kind of independent voice. In the meantime, when there is a moment of desire for freedom it has to encounter the real world, meaning that one has to reinvent a position in the social reality. Within that moment, the most important thing is to deal with all kinds of conditions and pre-made discourses in a deconstructive way that can question fundamentally the established values, so very often playfulness, fun, humour, irony are effective.

PON: How much do you consider the exhibition spectator within the production of experiences of slowness, and different speeds within your exhibition designs?

HH: If you observe modern city life as being in the state of flux, of high-speed movements, the individual struggles to find their own space for slowness so they can think, express, exist or whatever. This is a very interesting reference for me to understand how an exhibition works as a spatial structure that can provide complex experiences for the visitors. What I tried to do in exhibitions like 'Cities on the Move', and especially 'Zone of Urgency', was to create a kind of overlapping of different systems, which represent different speeds, different spatialities in the world. In some parts you can see some quiet corners and in others there are more speedy spaces, whilst others are more implicit and all these things have to be woven together like an organic body. But firstly, this starts with an understanding of the purpose of the work of the artist; what they want to show, and to work with them together to mobilise all kinds of possibilities from the individual position to a possible collective relationship. I very often do the research first, with what kind of work, what kind of artist I would like to include in the exhibition and then work with the artists so they can propose specific projects for the exhibition. The second period would be working with our specific architects to plan the whole thing, to design the space according to the needs of each artist. Then thirdly, we try to put them all together to create an organic body. Then there is a fourth stage of the process of working with the artists again, where often we did the design with the architects and we have to go back to the artists to discuss the position of how to modify the whole thing. In the case of Venice for example, I try as much as possible to create such a back and forth kind of dialogue so we can all come up together.

PON: Is the idea of the exhibition as a dialogical space a kind of paradox, when all exhibitions are temporary endpoints of a conversation, where something always becomes fixed in time?

HH: I would even go a step further and I would like to go beyond this, and to consider exhibitions as dead ends. This is the thing I try to challenge and maybe transform or mutate from this kind of idea of an exhibition as a fixed presentation. I never consider an artwork as a dead object it is much more like a living body. So this is why I talk about the performative as curating and creating at the same

time. The artist does not only work in the studio but they work on the site and they also continue the work on the site if possible. This possibility has to do with all kinds of physical, very material conditions and how much the artist can stay there and how much the artist can use this space. At least I try together with the artist to push forward the possibility to keep the work as open as possible. This is why there are so many works in my shows that are unstable and almost incomplete and this completion needs the participation of the public and every participation can create a different outcome, a different result, and a different temporarily finished work.

PON: This appears to be close to aspects of Nicolas Bourriaud's idea of the 'relational aesthetic'?

HH: I'd rather not call it aesthetic, but relational maybe. Relational has to do with notions of subjectivity. In fact, subjectivity is never an isolated subjectivity. It is more about curating in the relation to the other that one can recognise oneself. It is more about Levinas's idea of 'you and me', but this idea exists in many different cultures beyond the West. It has almost been a kind of natural fact. The problem with aesthetics is that it has to do with the notion of form, to the notion of a fixed language. You can call it a discipline meaning a mode of sensation, a mode of feeling beyond any practical use, beyond any utility. As a matter of fact, I do not consider art as non-useful. It can be useful. The borderline between utility and aesthetics is never clear and it should not be clear.

PON: Is the 'relational' not just another way of proclaiming a kind of Barthesian 'reader in the text' scenario relating incompleteness and pluralism, to the continuous production of subjectivities? This seems to be opposed to a more traditional, historical notion of 'aesthetics', that of defining, closing down and fixing definitions of beauty and so forth?

HH: This idea of 'the death of the author' is a constant negotiation between the self and 'the other' as a way to continuously reinvent the individual. It is not only strategic; it is a kind of ontological necessity that is no longer a strategy. It can be seen as a strategy

on the condition that it is compared to other models, but in an absolute sense I think it is not a strategy. It is about how the world exists, how things exist in the most natural way.

PON: This idea of 'othering the self' in the reading of artworks, is similar to the terminology used as a means of advocating guilt or necessity for the inclusion of non-Western artists within international art exhibitions?

HH: This is true. It is a mixture of colonial exoticism and post-colonial guilt. As a matter of fact, the world has been changing so fast that it is not only in the West that modern society can live well, where people can achieve certain economic conditions and social justice for humanity. Even though this is a very Western notion, the idea of human progress is essential to every modern society and the notion of individual freedom and justice is an important thing. But even more important is to see in the world today from different cultural backgrounds the need to identify with this value and to invent new languages or models of thinking, expression, and living in order to create the conditions to achieve this humanism. In other ways, one can say that there are different models of modernity that have been generated by people from very different cultural backgrounds. The world has always been a place of exchange and even the notion of humanism is not Western. When you look at history humanism is a combination of many different historical resources. Without the Arabs there would be no Renaissance.

PON: Do you think of the exhibition space as a site of a production of a new meaningful vocabulary or as a means of presenting the human condition is possible in 'real time' as opposed to merely (re)presenting or reproducing culture already past?

HH: I think it is possible as a fragment of this expression. I do believe that with the accumulation of efforts at least this fragment can be enlarged. This is why I called my show in Venice a 'Zone of Urgency'. It is in the urgent negotiation that one can open up a kind of relatively independent expression. In a way it is true that this kind of project has been somehow related to some ideas of temporary autonomous existences not only as a strategy, but also as a kind of

Derridan activity. I don't know if the exhibition has been capable of transmitting this idea. At least it can be seen as an effort to articulate or to perform these ideas in a given context, in a given moment. We need more efforts like this.

PON: Are you suggesting a state of emergency in the Foucault sense of a 'criticality' in language itself, or that we are amidst a crisis of representation?

HH: It is not only a question of language because language is always the result of some fact. And the fact is that especially in the research of how cities have been made, I try to describe what I have seen. There is an idea of urban planning as a metaphor of how ideal societies are made. In the modernist logic there is tabula rasa: a plan to wipe out the past and build the ideal way of living in an empty space. It is always a kind of fiction, a kind of utopian imagination. Almost every city in the world has been produced, grown and developed continuously and diversely until its present state, and it has always been an accumulation of negotiated solutions to momentary crisis.

PON: There is a different association in the use of 'vocabulary' rather than 'language' when describing the urban experience and perhaps it is a more progressive, useful and open term in understanding how the structure of the modern city is formed?

HH: In the history of progress there is a very interesting possibility for difference, it is non-linear, but a multi-directional progress. This progress is seen in every city as a collage, a build of fragments and traces of historical moments. These traces are outcomes of the negotiation of the crisis of every historical period. Even Paris has been completely re-planned in the 19th century, but it is not a perfect planning and it's coherent realisation. It is a collage of a lot of different historical traces.

PON: Is your interest in urbanism, spatial histories and how it manifests itself in the development of different modernity's made apparent within your curatorial projects?

HH: It is key to thinking about the exhibition as a playground. It is about the space and how to relate to individual artworks within the space and how to generate new spaces for the visitor to have different experiences. The exhibition is a laboratory for the spatialisation of individual thought. It goes back to Foucault's writing on place and power and the fact that he wrote about how prisons, clinics and hospitals were organised. It gives us a very important suggestion that revolution is possible as long as one reorganises space.

PON: Do you consider the vocabulary of historical exhibition spaces and the exhibition designs of the laboratory years of the 1920-30s and onwards in relation to your own practice?

HH: Probably. Maybe I naturally took up a position to consider art as a living process; our work as a living process. Once again in terms of exhibitions, I think an exhibition is never a representation through objects of an idea. It is a specific context where some potential ideas can be expressed in a specific language. This potential represents an accumulation of every individual trajectory in life. It can also articulate these movements where the trajectory can change.

PON: Do you think there is amnesia towards the role played by curated exhibitions of the past and innovative curatorial initiatives within the Western history of modern art, which tends to be both artist and object centred?

HH: Yes. This is why I don't particularly want to identify myself as a curator. Of course there is a given notion or a given job of what being a curator is, but I'd rather take the freedom to say that I do not want to identify myself under the banner of curator. I refer to myself much more like a living person and I don't wish to give a definitive definition of what a curator is. I do know that there is a necessity to service people who are making art, but this service is never passive. If you want to be a curator, the more important thing is you should have a life-relationship to art. When you have this relationship, you try to connect art and real life together; constantly trying to dig a hole in real life for different ideas,

but in the meantime this hole is not isolated from real life. It's about trying to create an in-between space between two realities. I don't know if we should call it curating or not. I think making an exhibition is only an enlarged moment of your living process. It is like taking a microscope and looking at the virus and it blows it up, but the virus continues to live and to die. This process continues.

PON: If we take the microscope as a metaphor for curating, what is the curator doing when the microscope is not being used to look at the virus?

HH: Then it is out of use. If an artist is working to make art for art sake or a curator curating for its own sake then it is meaningless. In a way, I have a personal position that I do not want to justify what I am doing; I don't want to legitimise my ideas, my proposals, whatever. Just like I don't want to justify why I am living in the world, it doesn't make sense.

PON: So where does self-reflexive criticism fit into such an idea of curating as an extension of the living process?

HH: I have a maxim, which is to always understand your work in the most unprofessional way, and realise your work in the most professional way. That is basically what I try to do: to look at art and life in the most unprofessional way, meaning that I just don't believe that there is one thing called art or expression. Once you decide that this is the thing you want to do then you have to do it perfectly. Of course there is some critique coming in, but you must take it seriously. Many times I have been criticised, maybe because I didn't do it well, or maybe it is because we don't share the same idea, we don't share the same values. And maybe you can learn something from these people, or maybe you can convince them of certain things. The price you have to pay is that you cannot please everyone, you can only please someone or maybe you don't please anyone at all. It is not at all about pleasing. It is nice to make some friends, but maybe it is nicer to have some real friends who don't agree with you. I don't deny that I learn a lot from my friends but like everyone in life, fundamentally one has to negotiate between solidarity and solitude. Solidarity is another aspect of solitude.

PON: Do you think of curating as a middle-ground activity, where the exhibition is only one of a number of the outcomes open to criticism in the exchange between artistic activity and curatorial practice?

HH: An exhibition is not enough as a kind of criticism. It is more like an active statement of positions. To make this position more understandable you need other activities like writing, like talking, like conversation, like dialogues, lectures and other media. This is why I don't limit my work as a curator with exhibitions. I write, I do public talks, I teach etc.

PON: It seems clear that you find the term curator restrictive?

HH: Probably, but if this is the generally accepted term I can take it, but there are many different curators, not just one kind of curator, just like there are many different kinds of artists. That is fundamental and maybe we have to go back to this very medieval kind of debate and the question: is God a name or an existence? God is neither a name nor an existence.

END OF TAPE

Part Three

Appendix One: Interviews 2

K-Z

The Culture of Curating and the Curating of Culture(s): The Development of Contemporary Curatorial Discourse in Europe and North America since 1987

A thesis submitted to Middlesex University
in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy/

Paul O'Neill

School of Art & Design

Middlesex University

August, 2007

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEWS TRANSCRIBED*

* All interviews took place in person unless otherwise stated. They were transcribed as accurately as possible from the original audio recordings. All interviews were then sent to the interviewee for fact checking. In some cases the transcribed interviews were edited by the subject, these edits are catalogued by the date of receipt of these texts in the Editorial Notes. Otherwise the date of completion of each Transcription is noted here. This Appendix is bound in two parts of which this entails the second part in alphabetical order.

Index of Contents: K - Z

Footnote Ref Code	Subject	Place, Date of Recording	Editorial Notes
SC	Nicolaus Schafhausen	London, 15.10.04	Transcribed: 07.09.05
SI	Seth Siegelaub	Amsterdam, 25.07.04	Edited by Siegelaub: 28.02.05
ST	Mary Anne Staniszewski	New York, 27.05.04	Edited by Staniszewski: 21.10.05
STA	Polly Staple	London, 10.02.06	Edited by Staple: 11.04.06
STO	Robert Storr	New York, 30.03.05	Transcribed: 14.08.05
TA	Gilane Tawadros	London, 30.03.06	Edited by Tawadros: 07.07.06
TR	Eric Troncy	Via Email, 28.10.05	Edited by Troncy: 28.10.05
WA	Gavin Wade	London, 02.06.05	Edited by Wade: 29.03.06
WAL	Brian Wallis	New York, 04.04.05	Transcribed: 05.09.05
WE	Lawrence Weiner	New York, 08.11.05	Transcribed: 22.01.06

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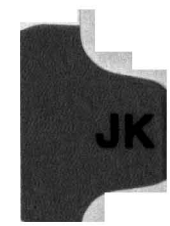
JK

JOHN KELSEY & EMILY SUNDBLAD

New York, 01-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: What is curating to your artistic practice and your practice as a writer and gallerist? Is that a term you're comfortable with?

JOHN KELSEY: Not really. I guess I'm not sure what the definition of the curator is anymore: information gatherer, symbol manager, DJ? We've been noticing how these days artists themselves often take on curatorial functions. Some artists are desired by galleries precisely because of the social networks they are hooked into, and in Chelsea it's not uncommon to find artists curating hip group shows. What does it mean for an artist to curate, not *as an artist* but as a hooked-up New Yorker? It's networking basically, it's multi-tasking. And then there's the dealer function too, which seems to have been increasingly absorbed into the behaviour of the artist today, in terms of elaborating workable relationships with collectors and museum curators or by showing up to party at art fairs, a task that usually falls under the job description of the art dealer.

PON: Are there specific examples you could draw on?

JK: No.

EMILY SUNDBLAD: We used to go to this bar called Sneakers. It was a transvestite transsexual bar on the West Side that closed down last year but in a way it was kind of a model for this gallery because it had a backroom-like function in terms of the transsexual scene. It was a place where they'd go to let their hair down and take off their make-up, shoot pool and relax and take a break from their image. It was maybe more of a backstage than a backroom, actually. We were trying to imagine a gallery that didn't show up in the city, or not in the usual way. A way of being here and sort of having one's back turned at the same time.

PON: So what was your thinking behind setting up Reena Spaulings Fine Art, maybe you could also explain the history of its origins?

JK: It started with Emily's immigration problem. Her lawyer decided that the easiest way for her to get a visa would be to produce a kind of business on paper. There was a business plan, which had nothing to do with what actually goes on in here, and it was presented to the INS. So that was the beginning. We sat on this cheap real estate for a few months, sometimes doing hour-long or day-long shows for friends only and not even shows, just using it as a kind of meeting place or studio, because we make art too.

PON: And the title of the gallery comes from a fictional character is that right?

JK: Reena Spaulings is the also the main character in the novel *Reena Spaulings* by Bernadette Corporation. We were still writing it when Emily and I decided to adopt the name for the gallery, and now it's a bit strange that the book is finally out. It has caused a bit of confusion having these various projects share one name. The character in the book has nothing to do with the dealer character we've elaborated here on Grand Street. And we don't really consider ourselves dealers so much as artists animating this Mary Boone-like Reena character who's actually a very aggressive business woman. So it's a way to displace the dealer function into a more fictional regime. And we've continued to displace Reena, so Reena could be defined as a sort of displacement-function, even. For example, a couple of months ago we and some of our artists did a show under the name Reena Spaulings at another gallery in Chelsea. It was a collective practice signed Reena, and the press release was modelled on Marcel Broodthaers' invitation card for his first art show in Brussels, where he announced his career switch from poetry to visual art.

ES: A gallery approached us like they'd approach any artist, after seeing a big painting on wheels we made under the name Reena Spaulings for a show at PS1. So we began to elaborate this double identity of an art dealer/artist. Implying that dealing may be a

higher form of art practice, or let's say a more logical form these days. Just like in the Broodthaers announcement, we also played on the kind of deal we were making, the percentages that Reena would take versus the gallery and this whole game of occupying another gallery with our gallery, of displacing ourselves into a Chelsea context. Because until then we'd always been perceived as a kind of alternative to Chelsea, for better or worse.

PON: Is that possible in New York?

JK: It is and it isn't. I mean, on the one hand we don't get a lot of that traffic here. And in terms of perception either by artists or collectors, there's always a kind of outsider idea, a longing for something real and underground (which New Yorkers have always been so good at exploiting). There's one big difference though between having a gallery here and having one in Chelsea and it's the cost of the rent. For a gallery in Chelsea it's impossible to sustain any sort of idea because any idea you might have about running a gallery is constantly interrupted by this other idea which is, you know, needing to sell a ton, every day. Here we can get by selling only one painting per month, if we want. We also noticed right away with our first events here that we got a lot of excitement coming from Chelsea about a hot new spot on the gallery map, something artist-run or 'alternative'. It's really easy to see, once that starts happening, how even the most hippy-ish tendencies are instantly put to work by Chelsea, instrumentalised as a kind of release valve for spare energy, as a place where people can come party for free or as the illusion of a trip outside the marketplace. As soon as we realised that we were already working anyway… we knew we had to work on this idea of work too.

PON: In the introduction to Julie Ault's *Alternative Art New York 1965-1985*, she talks about the idea of alternative, particularly within the New York art scene in the 70s and 80s and proposes the

impossibility of there being such a thing as an alternative any longer because it's an alternative to what, an alternative to the alternative or alternative to the existing dominance market driven structures within that city. So I am curious because you seem to be, you used the term alternative in order to describe what you were doing in terms of the perception of what you do. It seems to be that you're playing on these public perceptions of what the gallery is and what your function within that gallery is but at the same time operating between these two perceptions, one being the alternative and secondly being the mainstream, would that be true?

JK: I don't see any alternative either, to be honest. I think if you could call a back stage an alternative to the stage then maybe that would fly. But I think they work together and I think any other idea of an alternative in New York is kind of a mystification, it's just another lifestyle or brand identifier. For us, it's always been a question of producing something indifferent or immune to these binary oppositions.

PON: Do you see Reena Spaulings as an artwork, are you calling it an artwork in itself or do you see it as an extension of artistic practice?

JK: It's a mode of operating. It's a decision to perform contradictory roles at the same time, to absorb the division of labor and elaborate a practice that is not identical to itself. It's a way of inhabiting the city and of using the same codes that decide everything else, but using them differently. You're not outside of anything, you're just maybe working at a different speed within the same field. It's definitely not an artwork, but it might be possible to archive it some day.

PON: Are there any historical models, precursors or precedents that you were looking at in terms of your practice? You already mentioned Marcel Broodthaers for example?

JK: The Cabaret Voltaire has been a model.

ES: And Jack Smith's Plaster Foundation.

JK: Also Colin De Land's American Fine Arts, in a more direct way, and less as a model than because of the fact that some of us worked and met in that gallery.

ES: And Sneakers and the Museum of Eagles.

PON: Are there any other galleries or any other arts initiatives say over the last few years that have also been an influence or that you've worked with or been in dialogue with?

JK: Most recently, American Fine Arts. And that mainly as a recent example of a functioning New York business where somehow a huge measure of dysfunctionality is a part of its function, also the kind of proliferation of antagonistic positions as well as collaborations and fictions within the gallery, which is something that happens here too.

PON: How do you negotiate your relationship with the artists that you work with?

ES: It's on an individual basis and there are artists with whom we've never once had that conversation, the representation conversation. With others we've had to, recently, because there's suddenly been a lot of interest from other galleries who want to show them too. So it's usually the other galleries that kind of force us into that conversation with our own artists.

PON: Were you aware of the kind of London art scene in the early 90s with people like Bank and City Racing?

ES: We heard something about Bank, but I think the main difference with us is that we've started in the most hyper-commercial mode in

terms of having a business plan for the visa proposal, but as extremely commercial as that founding gesture was, it was also an extremely fictionalising one. So I don't really see us following that same trajectory from a kind of free collective to a gradual commercial endeavor.

PON: It is a self-reflexive performance in practice, I mean some people call it hanging out; other people could call it a self-reflective performative practice?

JK: It's true that the show we did in Chelsea was an articulation of business as a performance. But there's not always time to reflect in New York.

PON: Was The Wrong Gallery a reference point at all?

JK: Having a space that you can't physically enter, you immediately evade a whole set of problems which have to do with lived time. You know, shared experience, conversation, all the kinds of politics that spring up around the mere fact of a few bodies being collected together. Their conflation of the notions gallery and shop window is well-taken, but we're more interested in social relations and with what can happen to time in a space that's inhabited by people who work.

PON: You write for *Artforum*, how does the relationship between being a critic for one of the most visible art magazines in the world to working in a gallery that's slightly critiquing that in some ways?

JK: Well it's complicated because at *Artforum* they tend to disavow my involvement with the gallery. Maybe that's why none of our shows have ever been reviewed in there. I would prefer, in writing a review, to implicate myself more as a 'gallerist'. But there is a constant attempt to separate these functions that aren't in fact ever separate. They're completely interconnected in almost

everybody I know. Reena Spaulings and *Artforum* are not in fact two different planets, but we pretend that they are.

PON: If Reena Spaulings was asked to show as part of an art fair you said that you're possibly going to 'Liste' in Basel this year, how are you thinking about your representation there?

ES: After three shows here where we've hardly sold anything, maybe we can bail ourselves out in Basel. We will also be making work on behalf of Reena. And we're thinking of inventing a new artist for the art fair, and representing an artist that we will create ourselves. It's our first time doing an art fair, and we're wondering if it will work out for us there or not.

PON: Are you still operating as part of Bernadette Corporation?

JK: I'm still part of Bernadette Corporation along with two others, Bernadette in Berlin and Antek in Paris.

PON: In the book *The Power of* Display, Mary Anne Staniszewski suggests that there's a kind of repressed history towards exhibitionary display practice of the past and I would say that this ultimately enabled or impacted upon the rise of the curator as a creative entity but particularly within the last 20-25 years. Would you think that there is a link with such an idea of amnesia?

JK: For a second I thought you were talking about this other book called *Displaying the Marvellous*, which is about Duchamp's hidden role as a curator within the Surrealists' exhibitions. All you can do is take it back, which is what we've been trying to do. We've had a lot of dealings with curators who come in here and use our gallery for their own purposes, which is to get information. They go through our files, write down artists' names and phone numbers and they get ideas for a display or for collaborative models and then take it all back to the Tate or whatever. It's not always a nice feeling to have a curator come in here and use us as a free

information source. It's more work too. The function of the museum curator is to move around and gather information, and then redistribute it to museum-goers. The curator is like Vaseline. Or like any fashion editor at Cosmopolitan or whatever, the curator's task is often less about producing knowledge or experiences than about distributing information.

PON: I think there are different types of curator and this is one of the points of my research, that there are very different practices and that one can't throw all those practices into and under the one term, the term of curator. So there are also different artist curator models, there are different artists using different curatorial strategies, there are different curators using artistic strategies, traditionally known artistic strategies and vice versa. I think it is a discipline perhaps in the way in which art is a discipline you know, it's not just a job you know, it's a discipline, it's like you disciplining yourself to do something and that something has a means to an end as opposed to the purpose of it being about merely earning a living.

JK: Well a curator these days has really taken centre stage, I think, in terms of the way art happens in the world and I think one of the things we're interested in is putting the gallerist or the dealer back in the spotlight. To work on the function of dealing and exchanging, rather than the idea of a neutral white cube where business happens behind the scenes and the young artist is kind of magically renovated every month. To put the figure of the dealer right up front, to displace her. Anyway, dealers have always moved everything in New York.

PON: Why is the gallerist female actually, I never asked that question, it's just dawned on me. Is that symbolic?

ES: Particularly in New York there is a lineage of strong female dealers, but I think it goes back to the Sneakers moment too. Maybe Reena's a drag queen or even a transsexual.

PON: So what did you think of the 'Moscow Biennial', you reviewed it in *Artforum* recently?

JK: I thought it was an interesting situation because it was so dysfunctional. On the one hand there is this importing of a curatorial dream team from Europe to represent the global contemporary. And on the other hand, a massive excavation of underground, dissident Soviet art that had never been officially shown or acknowledged there before. And for me it was interesting to witness the collision between these two realities. Well, there were a lot more than two, but I was specifically interested in the illegal collective practices from 60s and 70s and 80s in Moscow, which during the first two days of the Biennial were seen by more people than had seen it over the past 30 years or so. So there was this kind of underground collective model which was really intense in Moscow for a few generations coming smack up against this 'relational aesthetic' idea from Bourriaud, and I guess I was interested in seeing how these two seemingly aligned models were actually kind of alien to each other. This hard difference was exposed, probably unintentionally, between the open works and professional collaborations of 'relational aesthetics' and the more intimate, risky and illegal collective practices of the Soviet times.

PON: I mean was there, in the case of Moscow, was 'Dialectics of Hope' a relevant title for the show?

JK: I don't even know what that means. I don't know, it was basically Moscow attempting to upgrade its image with a big show, like the Olympics. This also served to mask certain expressions of civic unrest or disbelief.
The curators did a brilliant job, and they did what they always do so well, professionally speaking. I think my main problem with the job though was the fact they were basically hired by the State as a public relations tool. There's a lot of social fragmentation erupting in Russia now and there were protests trying to happen

around the Biennial too. The Biennial was also about Russia presenting a newer softer image or friendly face, something like that. So they did a good job, and so did the artists and the viewers.

PON: What do you think of international biennials in general?

JK: It's the only one I've ever been to so I'm not an expert on biennials. All I know about them is there's more every year, they will come to you wherever you are soon.

PON: How familiar was the work that was there in terms of the visibility of the New York art scene?

JK: Not much from New York, but it seems to be the case with most biennials today that the artists that are curated are themselves professionals or adept at working with biennial curators. The contemporary stuff was real biennial art, successful in that sense. Although because of the bureaucracy there, some works encountered new difficulties and one or two never arrived.

PON: Can you tell me about your involvement in Bernadette Corporation?

JK: I got involved with Bernadette Corporation in 1999. Bernadette Corporation started in the early 90s. It was an underground fashion label, among other things, and they underwent a kind of internal split and ended up separating from the fashion designer, so that's when I got involved. Our idea was to self-publish the magazine *Made in the USA*. We only put out three issues, but in the meantime we've done other things.

PON: So what kind of projects have you realised?

JK: Well there's a video we did called *Get Rid of Yourself* which was based on our experiences in the riots during the G8 counter-

summit in Genoa, summer of 2001. That was a big project, sort of an experimental merger between Bernadette Corporation and the young anarchist movement in Europe. We got together one summer and decided to make the film. It's shown a lot around Europe in the last couple of years. Soon after that we began the collectively-authored novel, which was published by Semiotext(e) in 2004. Now we're trying to get a more ambitious film project going in Berlin so it's going to be, if it works out, a year-long process of shooting, editing and screenings. First we need to find a space in Berlin, maybe kind of squat an abandoned movie theatre or something. We're thinking of Thomas Edison and early cinema, but also of Warhol and Fassbinder, somewhere in-between. It's just, in New York or in any other big city nowadays, it's just the desire to make something happen. A friend of mine once said that 'empire is everywhere nothing happens'.

PON: Would you be comfortable with the expression DIY attitude towards your practice?

JK: When Kenny Schachter was doing his early DIY group shows in New York, it made sense at the time. It was immediately felt. I mean the term DIY had a certain kind of reality because it was following the 80s market boom and then crash, and somehow doing things yourself in the art world was a valid, even necessary kind of approach, just in terms of survival. It happened in fashion and music simultaneously, indie rock, early hip hop, that was all DIY. But I don't know if DIY means anything now. Everybody's multi-tasking, and it's as if DIY has gone into some kind of overdrive and that DIY practices are all integrated with each other on the same mainframe, cultural and economic, so I don't know if it makes sense to call it that anymore. If I use my program to edit my project at home, am I DIY? Is mass-emailing everybody about my screening at the museum DIY? I guess I'd rather not exaggerate the promises of desktop technologies and all that. Maybe doing nothing is the new DIY.

PON: Is your desire to mediate yourself as an art dealer an idea that goes back to Siegelaub in the late 60s, which goes back to the early days of curating?

JK: Yeah well the same thing happened here in the East Village in the mid-80s, artist-run galleries, small networks of friends opening up small spaces to do their own thing in their own time. Sometimes I wonder if our whole thing here is completely anachronistic. But I think it's our responsibility to make our own history, somehow. It's something we talk about: self-production, self-organisation, self-historicisation. But in a non-utopian way and with an eye on the present conditions. On the other hand, we're bad at documenting what we do. We'll probably be lost along the way, just like a lot of the East Village galleries were. I mean, I guess that was the case with the East Village, that everybody remembers the artists but not so much the galleries. A few maybe. Basically what Chelsea today is founded on is a kind of constant, collective production of amnesia.

PON: What do you mean by that?

JK: Well it doesn't matter what you put in these galleries as long as it's young and new and as long as it circulates as quickly as possible to art fairs and on the international biennial circuit. A perpetual present that circulates but doesn't move or change. Unless there's a market crash, or maybe a bomb or something.

PON: What are your future projects here?

JK: We don't think that far ahead, we're kind of short-sighted ourselves. Our next project is to close for a month. We're not sure how we're going to pull it off though. I mean it's easy enough to just lock up the gates but we want to kind of frame it somehow. One idea is to displace the gallery into another gallery again, but not as artists so much as in a press release maybe for another art show. We don't know if it's going to work but Richard

Prince is opening a show in Chelsea during the month that we want to be closed and he's offered to let us write his press release in the form of an open letter from Reena.

PON: So quite different to Michael Asher's *Gallery Closed* project.

JK: Yeah, which has been repeated a lot in New York. So yeah, it's not enough to just close. Daniel Buren did that too, he just painted the gallery shut, and I guess he kind of glued his canvas over the door so he could still do the stripes. It's a bit of a familiar gesture somehow so the displacement idea is maybe more interesting in terms of keeping the Reena figure active yet dysfunctinal, to disidentify her in relation to this space.

PON: I don't suppose art dealers do holiday as well?

JK: No they don't. They are like Surrealists, they even work in their sleep.

PON: Ok thanks.

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MARIA LIND

Munich, 31-10-04

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator? Is this even a term you are comfortable with?

MARIA LIND: I am comfortable with the term. I don't have a problem with it. I am actually detached from the 'cura' part of it: the caring part of it. With empathy being involved with something and to help it come about somehow. I think for me it is also connected with the role of the curator as a sort of midwife who is assisting in bringing something new into being. My background is in art history and I also studied Russian and Semiotics and Feminist Theory and something that is called History Ideas. And I started writing art criticism before I started curating and writing is still essential to my practice. I did my first project 13-14 years ago and I was initially, as many people are, a freelance curator doing smaller projects in Sweden and since then it has evolved.

PON: How would you describe your current practice?

ML: As from early on, I am now very influenced by artistic practice, so many of my ideas come from, many of the methods I use come from looking at work and talking to artists. I would like to underline that the starting point is art itself, the artworks themselves. I am also interested in context and how you relate to a specific situation, whether it is institutional or something else, and I am interested in considering context, the institutional context, the social-political context and so on. More than ever it is important for me as curator to, of course have an idea when you start with a project, but if I have a feeling that I know what the outcome will be then it is not interesting anymore. There has to be an element of exploration, of research, of finding something out which is new. And I am also less interested in display. I want to go beyond display, and if you look at the programme at Kunstverein Munich, you can see that the pre and the post is often as important if not more important than actually what we traditionally see as the moment of art in an institution, which is the display moment.

PON: Do you mean beyond the exhibition as 'the event'?

ML: 'Event', I think is a good term to describe something short term, so 'event' is positively connotative for me. But I mean something beyond the display. Something beyond the idea of having something on show: which is

to be looked at. Rather than, being engaged with in terms of the genesis, in terms of the discussion afterwards, post-festen so to speak.

PON: And do you incorporate failure into those projects?

ML: Totally, if you are not ready to fail it's not an experiment, and then you are not testing. That is absolutely essential.

PON: For the publication *Stopping the Process*? in 1998 you wrote, 'I am trying to combine the role of the provider, who creates possibilities for producing and exhibiting art, as much as possible on the artists own terms, with the creator or Harald Szeemanian or auteur, who thinks and feels through, who digests, historical and contemporary culture'. In light of the ever-increasing clash between these two positions, and your subsequent experiences at the Kunstverein Munich have you revised your position? Do you believe that such hybrid positions are still valid?

ML: I think I am still there. (Laughs) I am still trying to do both, not necessarily always within the same project. And if it is a question of the creator, or Harald Szeemanian or auteur position, then it is often together with an artist, or in close collaboration with an artist. And I think, we as curators should be able to take on different roles in different projects. The validity of each situation requires a different approach. Whereas a red thread must be to make sure that the conditions for the artists are reasonable in terms of production money if it is a question of new work, in terms of fees, in terms of treating them well, because of course, art is the starting point. I was always astonished at Moderna Museet in Stockholm, that so many members of staff would think that the artists were the last bits of the nutrition chain, so to speak, whereas, of course that is where it begins. How can anyone be paid if the artists are not being paid?

PON: For the project: 'What If? Art on the verge of architecture and design' at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm (2000), you invited artist Liam Gillick to participate as a 'filter', through which the artworks would take shape in the design and layout of the exhibition. Having an artist make exhibition installation decisions meant that certain dynamics happened within the design of the show that may not have been possible if

the curator did them. How effective was this as a curatorial strategy and is this a model that you have worked with again, even in a modified form?

ML: When we did: 'What If? Art on the verge of architecture and design', Liam was involved at an early stage and the filter role was, as you say, to work with me on the layout of the exhibition: the exhibition design, but it was also to be a partner in a ping-pong game. So we were discussing a lot, and some of the ideas that were actually carried through in terms of the method, the process, came from our discussions. It was not only on the level of design. It was also in terms of bringing people together, before the event. A year before the show opened, eight or nine people, artists who had dealt with art on the verge of architecture and design came together in Stockholm for a brainstorming weekend and that decision came out of our discussions, for instance. Then I selected the artists and the artworks, and we discussed the design a lot, and Liam eventually signed the installation design.

PON: And the term 'filter' would have come out of that process and discussion?

ML: Absolutely, it is a very 'Liam Gillick' term. Clearly. It was a great process. Interesting project, I think still. We have done something related here at the Kunstverein. It was a project entitled 'Totally motivated: A socio-cultural manoeuvre' in 2003 which was not only a collaboration between a curator and artist, but also between a group of curators themselves. There were five of us, people who were or had been assistant curators, the curator Søren Grammel and myself. We wanted to do something collectively and we realised that the notion of amateur culture, non-professional art-making was an interesting field and we invited a group of artists. Everybody had an input as to the selection of artists and all the curators and all the artists met prior to the exhibition here at the Kunstverein. We actually, after having met them all and discussed, asked Michael Beutler to design something overarching for the big space and Carla Zaccagnini as well. They ended up doing the floor and the ceiling. Carla Zaccagnini: a huge graphite drawing on paper, covering the whole of the second floor, like a Max Ernst frottage, which left traces not only all over the place in the Kunstverein, but in all our houses as well. For as you know graphite doesn't stick to paper. Outside in the arcades, there were footsteps all over. Michael Beutler made a huge

ceiling in his typical do-it-yourself style. So then again, the artists were somehow responsible for the overall design, but in discussion with the curators. I think it is often easier for other artists to accept, to be part of other artists overall designs than if it is the design of the curator. I don't think that it is always a good thing that they are so sceptical because I also think if the artists are confident enough in themselves, it's also fine whoever it is making a proposition for an overall setup somehow. And it worked well, I must say, in terms of the collaboration between the artists. One of them Bernd Krauss more or less moved into the Kunstverein, into his basement gallery, his Kellergalerie, in the little cabinet in the staircase here and spent nearly everyday here, doing his own version of our newsletter. He had an editorial office and photocopied his new issue everyday. It was a very interesting project involving lots of people, not only artists because it was about socio-culture. We had people talk about that type of more activist related practice. Real activists were coming. Rudi Meyer who has an amazing collection of ads using revolutionary imagery. He not only showed parts of his collection as part of the exhibition, he also came to talk about his collection and how the use of this imagery has changed over time.

PON: In your statement for *Words of Wisdom: A Curator's Vade Mecum on Contemporary Art* 2001, you claimed that the cardinal professional tool for good curatorial practice is precision. What kind of precision where you implying and do you still believe that this is the most important tool today?

ML: The kind of precision that I had in mind is how you decide for a format in relation to each particular project and the contents of each particular project. One example for me would be the retrospective that we did here with Christine Borland. This was a retrospective in eight chapters or eight stations, which went on for little more than a year because we were only showing one work at a time. And the reason for wanting to do that was that we thought how Christine's work itself is operating. As you know, it is often dense with information, which doesn't reveal itself immediately. You have to spend some time with it. The surface can be rather dry and looking, it can look quite rational, but once you engage with it, it's quite time consuming, and her own working method is slow. She does plenty of research and we wanted somehow to mirror this slowness. And when we asked her if she would be prepared to do

a retrospective in such a way, she was very happy. And we also thought it would be a gesture towards the local audience here, because the only people who could see the retrospective were the people living in Munich. So nobody just flying in for the evening to see a retrospective can do that. They just get one bit.

PON: How long were these eight chapters?

ML: It was different. A couple of them were up for a couple of months. One was up only for three weeks. It varied. And each work was shown in a different space in the Kunstverein. And one was also outside. We used the wardrobe, the shop windows, the backroom, the lobby, and the little cabinet.

PON: In the last 15-20 years there has been an unprecedented interest in contemporary art curating. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during this period and what are the dominant forms of curatorial practice that have developed during this time?

ML: I find it a little bit tricky to answer, because I have been around for between ten and fifteen years. And I cannot really say so much about how it has developed, but what I can say is that mainstream curating is still dominated by institutional logic. It is not following art and artists and this is a problem. I also think that the market has an astonishingly big influence on curatorial practice. Something we don't like to talk about but it is definitely there. It's often corrupting. If you look at the programme at the Kunstverein a majority of the artists we work with don't show with galleries. They don't sell at all. And this is unusual, I think, with any contemporary art institution. Not that anybody is collaborating in the sense of sleeping with the enemy, so to speak, but I think that we should often be a little bit more wary of these things than we are. Mainstream curating is mostly happening in the bigger institutions. It's easy to do successful mainstream curating. It is a formula that you quickly discover and can imitate and most of the time it works, but it's not particularly interesting. It doesn't develop any new ideas. It doesn't push anything further. I think it would be great if people could take more risks.

PON: Although the commercial art market informs curatorial practice, but do you think there has been a development of dominant forms of curating within a curatorial market?

ML: There is definitely a market. There are value systems and exchange systems which are not directly commercial, but which involve as much value, so to speak. That is obviously to do with which curators get to do such prestigious things and so on. And there are people who are more frequently appearing in those circuits than others and that is also problematic, in the biennial circus. But it is also interesting that you have some curators moving into more commercial work like Toby Webster from Modern Institute, Adam Szymczyk from Foksal Gallery Warsaw or Will Bradley, who is not so much involved in the Modern Institute anymore, but both Toby and Will were coming from a non-commercial background and now Gregor Podnar who used to run the Skuc Gallery in Ljubljana has opened a commercial gallery. They are all people whom I respect. Adam came from a commercial and went to a non-commercial, but the other three move in the opposite direction. And in that case it is easier for me to relate to them because I know them from before. And I know them as interesting people and curators so I have some more respect for what they do. I know that sounds harsh. I think this might be indicative of a shift because it is harder and harder to do free curating or experimental curating when institutional constraints and financial difficulties are growing. So, if these people had a choice I am not sure they would do exactly these things if they would get proper funding for other types of activities.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents, or precursors have been an influence on your practice?

ML: Again I have to say it's more than anything artistic practice. Very important for me was to get to know some of the artists active in Glasgow in the nineties. And to follow how they work, how they interact with their own work, with other people's work, how they talk about art in general. And the care I see being involved there. I think of people such as Douglas Gordon, Christine Borland, Nathan Coley, Jackie Donachie, Claire Barclay and a curator like Katrina Brown was really fantastic for me to see and experience. Also the type of practice that Liam Gillick is representing, where writing, teaching and curating a show and making artworks is all on the same level and where there is an interest not only in art, and that

also goes for the Glasgow people. But where there is a lot of focus on other things going on in society. And I must also say the work of people like Liesbeth Bik and Jos Van der Pol, and the type of generosity that they show, Rirkrit Tiravanija's work, Matts Leiderstam and Annika Eriksson in Stockholm. If I were to point out the work of other curators, I have been thinking about how Lynne Cooke is working. Her close collaboration with individual artists over a longer period of time, devotion to projects - long term. It's not about 'the hip' or making career moves. It is a real engagement. And also she is a woman.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past, in particular the laboratory years from 1920s-50s and the curatorial role played by people such as Alexander Dorner, Frederick Kiesler, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, Lilly Reich, Alfred H. Barr etc. Projects that you have you been involved in such as 'Totally motivated: A socio-cultural manoeuvre' and 'Telling histories: An archive and three case studies' at the Kunstverein in 2003, appear to have addressed a kind of amnesia? Do you think this amnesia has affected the way we perceive contemporary art curating and how do you think curators could address this repressed history?

ML: I think it definitely has effected it, but via negativa. Most of us haven't really been aware of these things. We have partly reinvented the wheel again, which on the one hand is sad, but sometimes it is also good not to know everything because that can inhibit you, that can create a lot of anxiety. However, I think we need to look more at these older projects. I am curious myself and, as you have said, we have tried to address some of these issues here at the Kunstverein. With 'Totally motivated: A socio-cultural manoeuvre', it was more a focus on a type of culture that was very present in the seventies and which has now been pushed to the side, pushed under the carpet somehow: the amateuristic, the activist related, rather than particular exhibitions, or projects. 'Telling histories: An archive and three case studies', on the other hand, looked at three key exhibitions in the history of the Kunstverein, one from the seventies, one from the eighties and one from the nineties. All of them having caused a heated local debate. We were interested in investigating what these reactions were and what caused them. So, from 1970 the exhibition 'Poetry

must be made by all, transform the world', which was an entirely documentary exhibition about some of the art movements of the early twentieth century, where art and life were placed side by side. And then there was an additional part to this show made by the students at the Academy in Munich who had recently rioted against the conservatism of the Academy, which at that time still had professors who had been acting Nazis. This exhibition, in the 1970s, caused such controversy that the Kunstverein was eventually closed. The second exhibition was the 1986 'Dove sta memoria' by Gerhard Metz which was discussed because of its use of Nazi iconography and the third one was Andrea Fraser's ' A Society of Taste', from 1993, where she used what later has become her brand of institutional critique, namely a Bourdieu-esque investigation into the functioning of this particular type of art organisation, and how it interplays with the high bourgeoisie social life of Munich. And we didn't put all three shows really on display. There was information in the show, but not the way you would normally encounter documentary material in an historical exhibition, namely as photographs on the walls, or as maquettes. There were a limited number of photographs and a fairly short explanatory text on each show and one round-table designed by Liam Gillick per show. Not a whole lot in the first instant. Then we showed all our archival material, in terms of files, all the photo documentation that exists and through this project we actually managed to assemble all the photographs, we had them labelled for the first time. All the catalogues were available that were produced here and all the press clippings. The way the archive was organised was very much influenced by the Brazilian artist Mabe Bethonico's choice. She made a kind of journey through the archive, and divided it into collections: exhibition files, catalogues, and photo-documentation and press clippings. She also wrote some shorter texts and excerpted things from interviews she made with our administrator, who has been here for twenty-five years. And some of these texts were then shown on the walls and she also set up a database, which is super useful, whereby any visitor to the show could ask how many times has a particular artist shown at the KM, how many visitors did the Kunstverein have in 1991, what were the exhibitions in 2000 and so on. There was always someone in the exhibition operating the computers, so people could get a printout of all of this. And in addition to this we also did three so-called talk shows - one for each of the exhibitions. We invited people who had been involved in the show at the time and also some younger people who we imagined would have interesting things to say about

them. And the talk shows were staged in the exhibition space as talk shows on television, filmed by several cameras, with an audience. And they were later edited and they are now being sold as videos. So it is another type of mediation in terms of creating a discussion, not with audience interaction. It was really on stage, but where things came out and those on stage discussed. It really was quite interesting and also that we decided not to make a catalogue but a video and DVD of the process.

PON: At both KM and Moderna Museet you encouraged a more flexible approach to the institutional framework, where the institution functions as a research centre, production site and a distribution channel. This is something that Charles Esche also tried at the Rooseum in Malmo with the museum operating as 'part community centre, part laboratory and part academy'. Are these isolated cases or are there new institutional models evolving and how do you see the primary function of the contemporary art institution?

ML: I think that there are definitely new models evolving and developing, but they have a hard time. And I am not entirely optimistic in terms of the possibility for survival. One of the most important things today for curatorial practice is duration - which things can go on for quite a while. But to run these kinds of programmes like Charles Esche has at Rooseum or that we have done here, or what Catherine David has done at Witte de With in Rotterdam, has proven to be difficult in all three places. And none of us is continuing and that's not a coincidence. There are other people elsewhere who are trying, but these are perhaps the clearest examples. I hope that they can survive, but it's super hard, because the audience are not prepared and it's, for instance, quite difficult to get press coverage on these types of events, because the press is still needing and expecting maximum contact service, meaning they only write about big things which many people can see. So if it is a one evening event or a series of events where a critic has to come back several times, it is very unlikely you will get coverage.

PON: In some ways this comes back to the question of amnesia?

ML: Yes, this practice is running much bigger risks of becoming forgotten, absolutely. And I think art criticism today doesn't do its job, so to speak, in terms of developing formats or ways of writing that fit this

kind of practice. And we are not doing this because we think that this kind of practice is so new and experimental. It is a response to the art and if we are not responding to the art, what's the point. And I think, much more interesting work is being done today in terms of curatorial practice than in terms of writing about art, but I hope that the art writing will catch up somehow, but it probably won't happen within the framework of the established art magazines.

PON: Do you think that curators have a responsibility within art criticism, in terms of producing a particular discourse, a new vocabulary, and a new model of criticism that could mediate or engage with this kind of practice?

ML: To use the term responsibility is a bit tricky. Some curators could do it, but then there is only 24 hours to the day and to run this type of programme is often so consuming in all ways that to even think about developing a model of how to write about it is not humanly possible. I think there are other people around and that is one of the good things about having these curatorial programmes. I personally chose not to go to a curatorial programme. I went to the Whitney Independent Study Programme, but I did critical studies and that was a conscious decision because I felt I could only learn curating by doing it, and I still think that is the best way of doing it. But what we do get with these courses is people who can function in the art world within different capacities. So you will have people who will have this training, knowing a lot about how things function, how a project or an exhibition is being put together who are press officers, who are project co-ordinators, who will be fundraisers and potentially also who can write, and who can potentially develop these new models. It is a bit like art history. How many of the people whom I studied art history with have become art historians? It is just a fraction but it's great that there are people like myself, and others who have art historical backgrounds, and the same with a curatorial background.

PON: There is an argument to suggest that many people who would have become critics in the seventies, or early eighties have now become curators, so somehow a certain form of cultural production has replaced another and become more dominant within the field of contemporary art. Do you think curating has replaced art criticism in some way?

ML: Yes, I think that is very true. I started as a critic myself and I left it for curating, which is far more exciting, although writing is part of my curatorial practice, not writing criticism, but writing as part of my practice. I think curating is fantastically interesting because it is real time, because it is real people, real objects. It is about literal encounters between people, literal experiences of something in space that we can share with others. This is what Irit Rogoff talks about as a kind of shared, almost communality. And this is precisely what many people are looking for, desiring, longing for today: these real discussions and the art world more than anywhere can provide it, because we do still have spaces where we can gather. And art, or certain branches of contemporary art, is intensely involved or engaged with the surrounding reality. So you can get a certain type of participation within this context that is not easy to get elsewhere.

PON: In her essay 'Harnessing the means of production', Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt critiques this new institutionalism for what she believes is a co-option of process-led art practice into the curatorial framework of the institution. Do you think this is an unfair critical analysis?

ML: I think when she talks about the co-option of process-led art practice she is mainly criticising institutions like Tate Modern and the ICA, London. She is also criticising Rooseum and the Kunstverein, but less so than the others. Unlike her, I don't think the institution itself, per se, is suspicious. I think you can do a lot of good things with the institution. I am inclined to agree with Roberta Mangebera Unger, the Latin American sociologist and activist, who is calling for a new institutionalism, a kind of renovation, and reinvention of the institutions. He means that, in both the neo-liberal societies and the social democratic societies the institutions are in crisis in general and I agree with that, but we shouldn't give them up, we should reinvent them and you can do a lot with them from the inside. But where she has a point, is again in terms of 'duration', because where have these attempts to reinvent the art institution survived. The DIA art foundation maybe, but elsewhere not really. It's sadly rare, I think. They might be allowed to exist for a while, or they mutate into something less challenging, something more streamline, so to speak and that is a problem. I don't think there is an inherent opposition between artists and institutions. Institutions have for a fact exploited artists, but not all institutions

do it all the time. There are other ways of reconfiguring this relationship.

PON: On another level, Rebecca Gordon Nesbitt seems to suggest a reverence towards artistic practice, and by critiquing certain institutions that have co-opted or adopted artistic strategies within their institutional framework, there is an argument that they are kind of un-doing the more critical forms of art practice - a kind of ripping off. Would you agree?

ML: I think we should always try and put art first. I think Rebecca and I would agree on that, but it doesn't mean that any kind of approximation, or if these two come closer to one another, artists and institutions, it doesn't mean that it is necessarily bad. Not that she is very reverential towards artistic practice, but it is more what happens when that practice meets something else, because she thinks in terms of contamination. In some cases you have to look at these big machines like Tate Modern and how they interact with artists. And that is also a financial issue, because of course they charge admission and at the end of the day artists often don't get anything out of that. It is different when you work with an institution like this. We don't get money from entrance fees, but of course we get credit from working with certain artists. We also are eligible for certain grants because we work with certain people, but unless you are very cynical that is not how it operates.

PON: Time, rhythm and different speeds of activity seem to be crucial to your programme at the Kunstverein. One of the projects you instigated is the 'Sputnik Model' as a means of developing slower, on-going, and more long-term relationships with curators, artists, writers and cultural practitioners. How have these 'Sputnik' or 'partner' projects developed as part of your programme? And how have these partnerships affected the way in which the Kunstverein operates as an institution?

ML: When we started, the curatorial team consisted of myself, Søren Grammel and Katharina Schlieben. And we invited fifteen people as Sputniks, most of them artists, a couple of critics and curators as well. And they were invited to travel with us, the word means travelling companion in Russian and we also asked them to think about a project, each of them, and that could be very different depending on who they are and what they do. And they were all invited for a meeting here before the

programme started in the winter of 2002. Most of them came and since then we have mostly communicated via email, with all of them. The collective meeting/events have been via email, so to speak. And then we have communicated individually with most of them. Some have been very engaged and have interacted in various ways, others have kept quiet actually. And that was interesting because people who I thought would be more active were not, for various reasons. I think at least a couple of people felt uncomfortable with the very openness of the situation. There was not a budget framework, a time limit, and a spatial limitation. The Sputnik project that has had the greatest impact on our everyday life working here at the Kunstverein is Sustersic's lobby, in which we are now sitting, which is the first interface between the Kunstverein and the audience. And which looks very different than it used to look. It is more inviting and comfortable and flexible than it used to be. This is where we do plenty of events, including lectures, screenings, talks, and for example: earlier today we had the release of the artzine *Fucking Good Art* from Rotterdam. They have made their first Munich edition. This is also where we hang out and we work here. First of all, the curatorial team is also on duty here in the lobby handing out information. Normally it is once a week for all of us. Then we use it for our meetings and so on. Another project that has followed us, literally, is Carey Young's 'viral marketing', which until now has had four parts. She has made interventions into the communications structure of the KM. They have varied. The first was a 'negotiation skills' course where we as the team were the raw material. A trainer, who is usually working for Siemens, spent a day with us trying to teach us how to negotiate better, which in Carey Young's terms, of course, could have a potential real effect on how the Kunstverein is operating. How we are communicating, how we negotiate with sponsors, members, artists, audience, press and so on. Some of us felt this was a learning experience, some felt that they didn't learn anything from the day. This was documented one year after the event when Carey came back and made interviews with all of us and I liked that, that she gave us some time to digest and then after a year we could give a report on when and how we had possibly used these skills. There was a moment of reflection upon reflection. She has also used the membership cards of the Kunstverein as another part of the project. She has done a power point presentation that was shown on the advertisement video-screens in the Munich subway. She has produced a number of free giveaways and she might do one final part before the end of the year.

PON: Have many of the Sputnik projects remain undeveloped?

ML: Yes, some of them have not really been communicating and some will never happen. But another Sputnik project that I would like to mention is Deimantas Narkevicius'. He is an artist and curator based in Vilnius. Very early on, he said that he wanted to make a show. And that was a bit surprising to us and maybe a little bit disappointing as well, because we had imagined that they would want to interact in ways that they could not normally interact with an institution because the doors were so open, so to speak. But we said yes and it ended up being a show with a couple of works with himself, a couple of works by a young artist from Vilnius, Mindaugas Simkus and two films by Peter Watkins, the British filmmaker. All of them being intensely interested in documentary practices, all of them having Lithuania in common because Peter Watkins lived there for about ten years in the nineties. And in retrospect, I am really glad it happened because we have had this overarching theme of documentary practices during the last three years. So this was a very interesting component to that whole thing, even though it is a rather classical exhibition. It was also interesting because it brought in a filmmaker who really has twisted the notion of documentary through *The War Game* from 1966, which was stopped by the BBC. And the other thing was how Liam Gillick reacted. He was glad to be able to interact with us differently, that we did not expect a project; we did not expect a work, or an exhibition. And when we asked him to help us with the practical 'user surface' of 'Telling Histories', as well as being a kind of ping-pong partner, it was perfect. Matts Leiderstam will do his Sputnik project in two weeks time. It will be a two-day performance connecting the Kunstverein with the residence, which is the Royal Palace across the park. And he will also use the park in the middle and it is all about reflections and ways of seeing and how we see and perceive in an art space and other spaces. And he is somebody who has been involved, as a Sputnik, through constant discussions, particularly with me but also with other members of staff, about this particular institution and also about what contemporary art institutions in general can do. What the potential is, how one can live this potential somehow?

PON: In some way, there seems to be a parallel between archival research and the kind of ever-changing nature of the part played by serendipity and chance in the temporal process of exhibition making?

ML: Yes, I think it is important to create a structure, but it mustn't be too tight. There must always be room for manoeuvre, space for playing and the Sputnik model has provided that, I think. We have given people time. We have said here we are, here is the institution for you. We have a budget. We will try to provide you with a budget and if you tell us in advance it is easier for us to raise extra money, if necessary. And again, I think the contribution by somebody like Lynne Cooke, another one of our Sputniks, who has invited Chantal Ackermann is not really chance but maybe not also what I would have expected, but it turns out to be absolutely brilliant in relation to the programme. Chantal Ackermann is somebody with whom Lynne has worked with over a longer period of time. So they are Sputniks to one another, so to speak. And Chantal Ackermann is someone who has definitely explored documentary practices and possibilities in her own filmmaking.

PON: In the 2003 Kunstverein Editorial it says: 'The critical reflection on curatorial practice in general is, thus, no less an integral part of our programme than is expounding the problems of current and existing practices of mediation and the search for new formats and further possibilities for the mediation of art.' How has this critical reflection taken public forms of representation and debate as part of the Kunstverein programme?

ML: One very simple example is that we decided that the curatorial team would also regularly be working here in the lobby. We would also be here handing out information, selling coffee, and be available for people to ask questions, as a way of demystifying curatorial process. We are here, we are around, and you can talk to us. We might work on our computers, but we are here and if you want to we can also talk. And another example would be the video screening series that started in April 2002 entitled: 'It is hard to touch the real', a programme that subsequently went on for two years. We were interested in how artists work with documentary practice, often in relation to television, single channel work rather than installation, and we were clear about the fact that we did not want to make an exhibition out of this, to assemble as many examples as possible

and to put them under the one roof at the same time. Instead we decided to go for a de-territorialised model. We invited one artist for a monographic screening and the person came and presented his or her work. The artists were present; the audience could intervene and ask questions, comment and so on. We then collected the work they showed in an archive and after the first year we asked these artists to invite five more artists on the same topic, for a festival. So we had a three-day festival with around fifty new works by fifty artists and we collected these videos as well and then the archive was on display during 2003, when we continued for the second year with the same model. And when these two years of screenings and two video festivals were completed, we sent the archive on tour and it is actually now in Sheffield at the Site Gallery. This is a search for a new format, I would say, not to fall into the trap of using the exhibition because we are used to using it, but to think about what does it mean to look at a video, what does it mean to spend hours and hours in a dark space, and what does it mean to do with or without immediate mediation, meaning that immediately after you have seen something there is somebody there to talk to you about it.

PON: One of the things that struck me at the Kunstverein was how soft or quiet certain aspects of the display were and how busy other parts were in the 'Teasing Minds' exhibition. For example, the way in which Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster's single video projection occupies a very large space on its own. The projected image is so vague and without the lights off it is almost not there. Whilst there is an abundance of information articulated through various forms of literature, audio works, video interviews, seating etc. in the adjacent with projects by Bik Van der Pol, Ibon Aranberri, Copenhagen Free University and others. On one level there seems to be a very slow and contemplative space produced next to a rather congested, hyperbolic display that demands a lot of involvement, reading, viewing, participating. Is this a dichotomy that you are very conscious of?

ML: It is very conscious. It is like in some peoples' houses things are organised in one room and then there is one room where there is almost chaos. I think it is exciting to encounter things in different ways and this is one way of doing it. The video work in the first space by Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster must be shown in a very bright space. It is an overexposed video itself, so you should almost not see it. You could

basically pass it or it is like you have some dirt in your eye, which is annoying you and then you realise there are some figures running around in a very bright landscape in the video. The 'Teasing Minds' project evolves around ideas of failure, mistake and thinking something is missing. Everybody has contributed different parts and I can say that somehow the whole is like what Philippe Parreno sometimes calls 'narrative cloud'. So there is a narrative cloud going on, but within this there is openness at the same time as there is quite a lot of precision. For instance the workshops with STEALTH: Ana Dzokic and Marc Neelan are running throughout the exhibition period, looking at certain parallel cultural developments in Munich and these involve people from here and people from elsewhere, specialists from artificial intelligence, from sociology, from neurology. My contribution was with Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. I wanted to include this very video, because of its otherness. It's something that you almost don't see, almost you think is missing, but is there and you look at the video and you think that must be people of vacation running around on a beach, having a good time. You see some kind of constructions looking like sun hats on a beach, beach huts or something. And then you realise, no there is no sea here, no water whatsoever, this must be something else, probably a desert. Then you realise when you look closely at the title, it is a work from an American desert where they have made nuclear tests, which is of course a repressed part of recent history and it has paradoxically enough become a tourist site. That was important for me to have as an entrance to the project and then this density in the middle. I love it, and then at the back is Andrea Geyer's work: *Parallax* is a complex slide installation looking at notions of citizenship after September 11th from an American perspective, but using two big cities as its stage: New York and Los Angeles. She uses lots of newspaper material and from news agencies as well. She is also using photographs she has staged and taken, with a female protagonist moving through these two big cities. And there you have something that is kind of, in a way missing in the discussion, a formulated discussion about how citizenship has changed in the US. You get bits and pieces, but you don't get it as a developed discourse. It is very important that these two works are the beginning and the end of your trajectory through the space. The middle part is more about reading, listening and talking. It is a workshop space. One thing does not exclude the other throughout the display. Art is there for discursive reasons, but art is also there for contemplation. It is there for critical investigation like in Andrea's work and I am distinctly not

interested in judging things out, so to speak. There is so much of this going on in Germany that you have to be kind of almost orthodox in one way or the other. For me it's much more exciting to plays things off one another. Let them play with each other also.

PON: This brings me to the question of performativity, which can be understood as the constitution of a meaning through practice or a certain act. In the short essay published on the Kunstverein website: 'Reflections on the concept of the performative' written by Katharina Schlieben, 'performative-curating' is represented as a dynamic process of mediation and self-reflexivity where the 'per-formed' events remain transparent about their production process whilst remaining open-ended and unfixed - a kind of materialised thinking through speech acts. Could you expand on how certain concepts of the 'performative' link to your ideas about contemporary art curating? Have you used the concept of 'the performative' as a testing site in relation to your curatorial practice and activities at the Kunstverein? What kind of strategies or systems of mediation have you used to produce a greater degree of public transparency within your projects, exhibitions and overall programme?

ML: For me, the notion of performative curating came up in discussion with Søren Grammel before we started here in Munich. When we were just trying to find words simply in conversation to describe what we meant when we were having a focus on the pre and the post, of how things come about. And I think in my case, it's also a materialist, Marxist and pragmatist position, being concerned with conditions and means of production. How things come about? And that things don't only come about before they enter the institution, they also come about from scratch within the institution. For me the performative relates to a materialist and pragmatist interest in the means and conditions of production.

PON: Does the performative represent a demystification of the contextual thinking behind a curatorial idea and how that manifests itself in different formats of its production and mediation?

ML: Yes, it is not that we have used the performative as a focal point here. It is something that has come up when we have struggled to describe what it is we have been doing. So it's something that comes afterwards. It's on the side of the practice, it's not that we try to be performative.

We do something or we operate in a way that we find appropriate in relation to the art we are involved with. When we then call it performative, it is just a designation. I am not so concerned with investigating the notion of performative.

PON: It has become such a slippery term for curating as 'doing as thinking' and 'thinking as doing' within the exhibition-project? The exhibition as a speech act becomes a kind of vessel of visibility of the curators' thinking and doing? Is this not too vague?

ML: It is less than a naming involved if you make that parallel between what we have done here at the Kunstverein. It is much more pragmatic than that. In the sense that it is about doing, testing something that you don't know beforehand. We might be able to give it a name afterwards, but while we are doing it we can't really. More than to a certain extent, I don't think we should be able to really name it because then we don't really need to do it. If you make the parallel to speech acts, for us it's more about showing the love in what you do than merely saying I love you for example. So it is less about talking and more about doing and thereby not making a promise. But you test it then afterwards with the result. Does the result match with the expectation?

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is? How would you describe a good curated art exhibition?

ML: Yes we can and we should. We even have to. It's very contextual again. I would like to mention two things that I have found inspiring and to a certain degree well-curated projects. The first one was the '6th Werkleitz Biennale', in Halle this year. It's a one-week event. This year they were interested in questions of copyright. The Biennale included a series of workshops; Bik Van der Pol did one of them. There was an exhibition, a series of screenings, a series of guided tours etc. I am not sure if all parts were excellent but the constellation of types of events, but the topic they were addressing was interesting, the length of the project and the location of the whole thing in Halle. It actually took place in what was called a people's house, which was built at the turn of the century by the Labour union as a meeting place for workers for cultural activities, meetings, and so on. It is a building that is almost falling apart, but it was great to have this very event in that place. Many people came and it

turned out to be a true meeting point with plenty of interesting discussions. And all these components made it into one of the most rewarding things that I have experienced, in contrast to 'Manifesta 5', in contrast to the 'Whitney Biennial', the last 'Venice Biennale' and so on. I am not alone in feeling that these big events do not give us much anymore, but this one did. The other example is a one-day exhibition that I saw in New York recently, curated by Andrea Geyer at the New School. The title was 'Identify! Or Studies on the Political Subject'. Of course super-relevant now, just before the American election including artists from various parts of the world and the works were inserted into a school situation. You had monitors sitting on school benches: works by Yael Bartana, Katya Sanders and Helmut Weber, Sabine Bitter, Florian Wûst, Sharon Hayes. In another room there was a seminar room with a small installation by Ashley Hunt. Matthew Buckingham's new film was shown in an auditorium. Andrea's *Parallax*, which we shown as part of 'Teasing Minds', was showing in another auditorium - great individual artworks working well together for this brief and an intense event with perfect timing. Two weeks before the elections. Both of these projects reinforce my belief in the necessity to rethink timing and rhythm within our profession. So many things are completely wrongly timed.

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UTE META BAUER

London, 17-10-04

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator? What is your background?

UTE META BAUER: I am not sure if I ever became a curator. It is getting too complicated within the art system if you try to explain what you are interested in and what you do from which perspective, so it is the most pragmatic to say you are a curator. I have studied at an art academy where I was a member of a group called Stille Helden e. V., and we self-organised projects as there was no space for younger artists and work that was tran-disciplinary in existing art institutions in the early eighties. We did a number of projects in different spaces and I couldn't say it was caused by what later was called 'institutional critique' or whatever. We weren't even aware of what is a curator or what is institutional critique. We simply were not interested in these for us than boring institutions, it was much more a moment where we as a group along with many others were interested in other spaces and formats of distribution. I cannot remember when I really started to think that I am active in a curatorial field, as far as I recall that was way later when I took the position as Artistic Director at the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart.

PON: Where was this?

UMB: For example, one of our first exhibitions, that we than called 'Stille Helden production' - more related to the division of labour in theatre or film - took place in an empty factory hall 'Kampnagel', then not as common as it's today. We organised several exhibitions, always combined with performances/concerts and components of video/film. As I studied stage design along with the others of our group, the combination of working with texts and contexts was normal and to me the difference to an art class and this dialogue between text/context I missed as well in exhibitions. Another project we conceived a bit later was 'Kunstkongress '88', a three day event in different kinds of venues. Initially a part was scheduled to take place at the Hamburg stock market, as we considered the art system and our conceptual ideas are as abstract and immaterial like the stocks that circulate at the bourse and the same counts for the agreed value of an artwork comparable to the value of a stock. We thought it's the right place to locate ourselves. First we got the permission to use

one of their halls with beautiful old wooden benches, but then they cancelled. So we had to go back to three arts related institutions - the Kunstverein, a theatre and an art fair. Anyway it was not even so much the idea of getting an interesting or exotic space, it was for us just to go to a location that suits our concept

PON: If you were to trace a possible development of dominant forms of curatorial practice since the late eighties, what would you see those to be?

UMB: It is difficult to track them to a specific moment, as seen from my perspective there existed always parallel activities and practices. It's quite difficult to determine a specific moment when certain practices started. Various practices always existed - for example the 'apartment exhibition' and it is more about when they entered or crossed the attention of a mainstream reception. So the critique, the media, and the market etc. often discover them way later. So which practice is inscribed in which moment of time - reflects more when certain curatorial approaches entered the spotlight of wider recognition?

PON: Was there a moment for you, where you realised that what you were doing could be defined as curating, or have you ever been comfortable with that?

UMB: Sure I realised at some moment that what I did was labelled as curatorial work. For example after our 'KunstKongress '88' I got a job as a project co-ordinator for a big 'art in public space' project, that included Michael Asher, Dan Graham, Jenny Holzer, General Idea, Group Material just to name a few. These projects were aligned with an exhibition titled 'DNS: Different und Simultan', curated by Thomas Wulffen and Frank Barth, where we were invited as artists with Stille Helden e.V. So on the one side I participated as an artist; on the other side I got commissioned to execute and realise the works of other artists. Then you start thinking about what's the difference between giving shape to your own concept than those of someone else. Besides the fact that with the first one we hardly earned money and the later one finances the first.After these projects,I was asked if I was interested to develop and execute the programme for an artist-run

institution, Künstlerhaus in Stuttgart, as its Artistic Director. That was a kind of continuation of my work with Stille Helden - but instead of collaborating with the same group that meant to engage with different artists. Initially I got asked to take the position along with Susanne Homann, as we were 'leftovers' of our group Stille Helden. The two of us were organising the last projects of the group, but well, Susanne said no way, she did not want at all to move to Stuttgart. But as it's my hometown, I could imagine it might be interesting to have the continuity of a programme expanded over time, and to develop an audience along with it. And that was somehow the moment I realised that what I did was the job of a curator. I got this label 'artist-curator' from the outside, and I did not like this term at all. Sure I don't come from an art historical background or from writing. The moment I started my position at the Künstlerhaus, I decided that's it, I am no more an artist - but sure my curatorial interest and way of working is shaped until today by my artistic background.

PON: When you say that you don't like the term curated by 'artist-curator', do you think that it is necessary to separate these two roles within a cultural project?

UMB: No, not in that sense that I would want this as first information before one even has seen an exhibition or a project. I don't like this separation for myself. John Cage has made wonderful exhibitions as an artist or Hans Haacke curated an exhibition reviewing the museum storage commissioned by the Boijmans Van Beuningen Museum, as did Remy Zaugg or Fischli and Weiss. Sure it is important to communicate that it has been artists, who were the curators, but for me these exhibitions are interesting if they unfold a challenging discourse, as do other exhibitions curated by art historians for example. Curating is another methodology of working than your own artistic practice, sometimes this overlaps - in practices such as those of the artist Fareed Armaly for example, to him research, editing and curating are integral and essential parts of his methodology. I definitely do not call myself 'artist/curator', when I curate - well than I do it as a curator. The theatre author Nathalie Sarraute answered once in an interview asked by Hans Ulrich Obrist about anti-theatre, that anti-

theatre doesn't exist[1]. Anyway I don't like the limits of labels, but to call myself a curator makes it more easy for others, but I consider myself as well an editor, educator, etc.

PON: Are there any particular past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents, or precursors that have been an influence on your practice as a curator?

UMB: A discovery of creative outburst to me was Punk. That was wild, it was androgen, and it was like to be kissed awake after the soft flower-power hippie times. I first studied stage design; as to me contemporary theatre seemed a world offering exciting and new approaches of performative action, a renewed way to deal with space and text. Take the than New York based Squat Theatre, the Wooster Group, composer Glenn Branca collaborating with choreographer Merce Cunningham etc., performances by Meredith Monk, plays by Bob Wilson and so on. Exhibitions I found less interesting in those days. 'Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk' by Harald Szeemann and Kasper König's 'Von hier aus' in Düsseldorf were important to me, as they dealt in another way with the artworks in the exhibition space. They worked with a strong narration of the space. And surely main influences were the exhibitions and events initiated by Rudolf Bumiller and Achim Kubinsky in our flat and other places in Stuttgart. This marked a kind of kick off for me. But to come back to Punk, women suddenly took an active role on stage, figures like Poly Styrene, Siouxie left great impressions with their cool look, their self-confidence. Or the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Ulrike Ottinger, VALIE EXPORT and Rebecca Horn opened my eyes to another world. Later I discovered links to Dada, Artaud and Cocteau, the Surrealists, Duchamp, the Situationists. If the door is once open you discover more and more. And then you start to enlarge your view: the approaches of Ray and Charles Eames, Lilly Reich, Frederick Kiesler. The early shows of MOMA New York, just take those curated by Kynaston McShine, the way they organised the space to make the works, the context communicative. Then I jumped back looking at El Lissitzky.

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[1] Obrist, Hans Ulrich: Interview with Nathalie Sarraute. In: *Atlántica. Internacional Revistas de las Las Artes*, Issue #22, winter 1999, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, page 124-127.

PON: You mentioned Lilly Reich, El Lissitzky and Frederick Kiesler. In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think this amnesia has affected the way we perceive contemporary art curating?

UMB: This amnesia affects artists as well. There is a general amnesia if it comes to history as such. But critical art historians and others have been rediscovering or re-showing, giving artistic positions a new reading, another context, and using exhibitions as a corrective. Sure it's not too many who work on creating a discursive space. To me curating is exactly about that and in my own practice, I often combine historical positions with current positions. Dan Graham has been important for me, he kept his fresh mind, is such a sharp cultural analyst and writer, a contemporary pop artist, a cultural producer, making montages of what he discovers and connects.

PON: Do you think that is one way in which this amnesia can be addressed by curators, and to locate their current contexts in relation to historical precursors?

UMB: Dan Graham, as Fareed Armaly, gives a good example for both institutions and curators alike how this could be done. Both work with a curatorial method as part of their artistic practice. Sure curators should work on this; it's kind of our job obligation, and institutions should offer the space and the resources for this.

PON: Do you think that this is happening or that it is visible within an international biennial context?

UMB: In biennials? Rarely. Biennials usually follow another agenda. I tried to work in this direction with the 3rd 'Berlin Biennial' for contemporary art and I got trashed heavily for it. The biennials are another chapter. But especially in the so-called peripheries or developing countries there is an increasing self-awareness and they start to fight against the hegemony of the Western art canon.

PON: Do you think that this is why the archive, or the idea of the archive has become much more prevalent in relation to curatorial practice?

UMB: This idea of the archive was always there. It is the same with artistic production. There is always a re-evaluation of a certain idea. Many topics come and go in waves. What would be important to increase resources to support a diverse set of practitioners to build archives introducing different material and perspectives on the same topics, fields of research, to communicate. There exists a variety of scripts for the same plot. But to come back to the everyday museum - performance art, audio and early video work, film, activist approaches, time-based practices are hardly seen in the permanent collections of museums. Museums never really adjusted to the richness of artistic practices and voices.

PON: One of the points that Mary Anne Staniszewski makes is that because of the temporal nature of exhibitions, or any cultural project, ultimately what survives are few photographs and exhibitions that are spatial experiences, whereas any cultural experience is particular to a specific social context and that somehow gets emptied out and becomes embodied within these singular representations and emptied out of its cultural specific, regardless if it is historicised or not. Do you think this perpetuates amnesia?

UMB: Well, we also need some amnesia in order to create something new and to reinvent what has been done in another formulation. Think about how often painting was claimed dead, and go now to an art fair. As a teacher I know what frustration it could be for students to realise that what they work on exists already, but sure generated in a different moment of time and therefore in a different context. The movement of time gives it another reading and perception. But as said, the Western art history is a very powerful canon. The exhibition 'Global Conceptualism: Politics of Origin, 1950s-1980s' 1999 shown in the Queens Museum of Art in New York, was indeed important to stress that conceptual art didn't only happen in the Western hemisphere. Or take modernity and its entanglement in colonial history - that aspect is not visible in most museums. And if it comes to the contribution that female artists made to art history, well there exists a lot that

needs to be reworked in most museum collections. Anger about certain amnesia is obviously a good motivator.

PON: Are there any current curatorial projects or initiatives that you think are achieving an element of filling in that amnesia, or replacing it with something that is more visible?

UMB: Yes, a lot is happening. Take INIVA - the Institute of International Visual Arts, they just got a new building by David Adjaye in London's East End - this got founded for that reason, to have an institution that would concentrate on today's diverse artistic practices generated by people from all over the globe including the UK. It is crucial not to review cultural history by chronologies, nations or countries, but by developments and movements in time and the contexts, constellations caused and embedded in specific geo-political 'arrangements'. And slowly major art institutions realise they cannot afford to keep their eyes closed. On a CIMAM[2] conference in Barcelona the director of one of these 'power museums' of modern art responded, that there is simply not the space for art from all over the globe in their museums. But sure they all have their Picasso, but no Wilfredo Lam.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making, how do you see your role as a curator and at what level of artistic production do you see your practice being involved within the process of art-making?

UMB: Well in my case, yes I am strongly involved. I am interested in working in close dialogue with artists or participants from other fields. As most curators, I work continuously with a number of artists. With the artists Fareed Armaly, Regina Möller, actually with most artists I have been working with. Fareed Armaly is a special case, after a collaboration for the magazine *Meta* I published, we developed and conceived as co-curators one of the five chapters under the title '?' for a major show -'NowHere' - initiated by Lars Nittve at the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art in Denmark. We continued to work on the questions discussed in the magazine, the archive, what

2 CIMAM: International Committee for Museums and Collections of Modern Art

is in- and excluded, what is forgotten, out of focus. It was the first time I got commissioned by a museum; therefore I wanted to reflect the specific context of a museum of modern art and its parameters. To do this in close dialogue with an artist I respect - bared the potential to share exactly this dialogue, its implied process, and facets with a so-called 'wider' audience. To develop the exhibition concept with an artist, who is critically interested and knowledgeable in these issues, and has another reading of a museum and its collection, was a challenging and demanding point of departure. Then we involved step-by-step more people into this process including architects, designers, and media people, DJs etc. Later we co-curated 'Architectures of Discourse' together for the Fundacio Antoni Tapiès in Barcelona. If you work on an exhibitions it's the sum of its parts, it is a process of creative thinking and for me an equal challenge than to develop a new work. What counts for me is a shared similar thinking, attitude and approach. Sure people in that case say I would interfere, manipulate artists and their work, but believe me the artist I work with - you cannot manipulate, they have strong opinions themselves that makes it so challenging.

PON: How do you feel about the 'NowHere' exhibition now, looking back?

UMB: We started to work on it in '94, the exhibition opened in '96. It was fantastic to work for a long time on the development of one project. Fareed and I spent a lot of time in Copenhagen, went to TV archives, visited all kinds of museums, spoke to a lot of people there to get an understanding, what determines the general and what the specific context, in which the show takes place and who might be its audience. It was indeed a very intense and demanding working process for all involved, but it was worth it.

PON: Hans Ulrich Obrist highlighted recently, that when he was talking about the difference between when he started curating and his more recent involvement with projects such as 'Utopia Station' in Venice, he said he had a lot more time to research projects before. Has this change in time-scale for projects affected the way in which you work?

UMB: In terms of the 3rd 'Berlin Biennial' I could say the same although I postponed the exhibition from the beginning to a later date and

still it was tight. The conditions to do such big shows under such time pressure and not to forget budget pressure one simply should refuse. When I mentioned this at the meeting of our annual international curator conference some people, typically from a German institution, got upset and called this whining. In contrary, I addressed we should finally fight for more proper conditions to do our jobs in a responsible manner and offer the artists and our teams acceptable working conditions. More than fifty biennials worldwide focussing on contemporary art have to share artists, financial support from national organisations such as AFAA (Association Française d'Action Artistique), British Council, FRAME (Finnish Fund for Art Exchange), Mondrian Foundation and others.

At the Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, we hardly had a budget but in this context of a smaller institution I could work intensely on one project at the time and develop it over months with one artist, but hardly an art critic would show up, as Stuttgart was out of the loop. Obviously sometimes one needs to make a bigger statement to get heard. It's not to show off, but to get certain issues finally across. There are indeed interesting projects made everywhere but it's difficult to get an audience. On the other hand in a time of smaller travel budgets and an increasing number of biennials, art fairs etc., you have to use this opportunity eventually to make a point. The 'Berlin Biennial' bared the chance to raise certain questions, such as what happened to Berlin's vivid subcultures after Berlin became a capital? Although certain members of the West Berliner art establishment found this obsolete - well obviously not the East Berliners. There are way more art institutions, art collectors than twenty years ago, and this machine of biennials, fairs and so on demands to be fed non-stop. You have to be, to a certain extent, spectacular or very controversial to stick out. Even as curator you are expected to provide a charismatic or eccentric personality. The increasing numbers of curatorial courses produce more curators than are currently needed and they have to create attention for themselves. I am not surprised that some young curators are mimicking the habits of Hans Ulrich, like ordering six espressos. That's sad in a way.

PON: I read an interview with you talking about the 'NowHere' show in Copenhagen and you said that the attendances for that exhibition, pre-

'Documenta X', it was probably the largest attended exhibition of that time. In some way that show produced a certain level of visibility for your practice beyond the local and into the international discourse around curating, so how do you locate that visibility in relation to what you have done subsequently?

UMB: As I said, occasionally you have to use these highlighted moments to get certain messages across. A good example for me was how Joseph Beuys used 'Documenta' as a platform. Quite smart the way he used television to bring his statements to a wide and diverse audience, that's one reason why I read him more as a Pop artist than a 'shaman'. As long as you are not forced to compromise nothing is wrong with a large audience - it's just a pity if smaller projects suffer from this. I enjoyed very much to work at the Louisiana Museum on 'NowHere'. But after 'Documenta 11', it was an interesting challenge to accept a position in Norway as founding director to start an institution from scratch first with one - later with three - colleagues working part time. The task was not a curatorial one, but to restructure the distribution of Norwegian national funding to foster the professionalisation and internationalisation of the Norwegian art scene. After being in the frontline of public attention for some years - in Oslo my work was more behind the scene, to engage and interfere with political bodies, the diplomatic corps, creating formats and structure, set parameters - but nevertheless very interesting for me. But then when the offer to curate the 3rd 'Berlin Biennial' came along, I could not resist. In the meantime I like to work in different settings, formats, scales - it keeps you awake. Currently I am developing a mobile archive on existing archives, again addressing the archive as such, together with a former doctorate candidate of mine for 'Insite05', a large-scale project addressing the border situation between Mexico and the US, taking place in Tijuana and San Diego. Although it involved two years of research the mobile-transborder archive is just a small appendix, a satellite project that sails in the shadow of the bigger event. It's not about art, but explores, along with a vast number of supporters, the context in which this art exhibition takes place. For me it's important to have both options: sometimes to be very visible with a project, generating a large diverse audience and to work in a small scale concentrated format that might just reach a few, or a specialised audience.

PON: One of the things that are very apparent for me within your practice to date is how significant the local context is to what ends up being the outcome; even with 'Berlin Biennial' you did that. Is that one of the primary platforms from which you develop your projects?

UMB: That goes back to my education in stage design. Working on a theatre play you have to understand the time, location, what does a character represent to unfold it properly to an audience of today? In order to transmit the meaning of its dialogues, what the author initially might have intended with his play, the reaction when it first got on stage, and where does a director situate it today. The same counts for artworks, as their reading is depending on the time and place when it is shown, the neighbourhood to other works etc. - so there is always a 'local' context, may it be geographical, historical. There is no neutral territory in which you can place art, even what you might have read in the morning newspaper influences your perception. As said fifteen years after the wall came down and in the year of the EU extension happened - I could not ignore or separate these facts developing the 'Berlin Biennial'. To create a discursive space with an exhibition implies exactly the link between what you show with where you show. I am quite influenced by feminist and political theory, from Beauvoir, to Arendt back to Luxemburg and French philosophy, Lefebvre, Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, Balibar/ Althusser and way less the Frankfurt School and more by Marcuse, who was critical to his Frankfurt companions, as he was involved and not distanced to what happened politically in the streets in the US. The last years I read more Stuart Hall, bell hooks, to read colonial history and post-colonial theory. The time I studied at an art academy, there was hardly art theory or philosophy, we had a quite open structure and we could self determine what we wanted to work on, whom of the faculty we wanted to see, but in order to understand your own work you need a certain background in theory, as it's such an important tool to deconstruct and to analyse. And it's hard to catch up later as we had to do. As well the lack of female teachers, and the need to understand why it is this way, supported my interest in context, topographies and setting - well and that includes an engagement in the local condition.

PON: What was apparent to me, not that is was necessarily a conscious decision, but that it seemed to be that your 'Berlin Biennial' offered some form of critique of the idea of the large-scale international exhibition as an autonomous artwork, the idea that, for example, the 'Venice Biennale' almost has this bubble around it, although representative of aspects of global culture, what does it say about the site of Venice beyond its biennale history and the work on display and its relationship with a wider global context? What does it actually say about Venice? To me your 'Berlin Biennial' seemed to be, consciously or unconsciously, a critique of that format?

UMB: To compare the 'Venice Biennale' with an approach I took within the 'Berlin Biennial' it would be like comparing apples with pears. The parameters in Venice are very different. Venice has its own symbolic capital and potential - to dig into its history, reflect the intention of the world exhibition, that was once the role model to start the 'Venice Biennale', the very concept of national identity represented through art, let's say I would be more interested to raise those questions.

PON: The term 'performative curating' has often been used to describe a kind of self-reflexive curatorial practice, associated with certain kinds of contemporary art curating, is this a term that you would be comfortable with in relation to your practice?

UMB: I feel more comfortable with the notion of a scripted space, and sure to me curating is a process-based practice. Well, the exhibitions I work on are usually staged and as a viewer you get involved in a spatial experience, in that respect there is a performative component. Hmm, and it's equally difficult to make a documentation of such exhibitions like 'Architectures of Discourse', it is shared with performative formats. The red strings designed by Fareed Armaly and engineered into the space to mirror the new architecture as a reverse spatial drawing into the historical architecture of the building were simply impossible to document with photographs. The day the show is taken down it's gone. To experience it you had to be there, it cannot travel anywhere else, and the combination of works will never happen again; in that respect most have their temporality and therefore as you say a performative component. People seem to forget that.

PON: A key word used by Seth Siegelaub to clarify the changing role of a curator in the late sixties was 'demystification'. How useful do you think this term is now in relation to contemporary curatorial practice?

UMB: Theory and social history is a good tool to understand the subtexts. From my understanding Siegelaub especially wanted to demystify the fog produced by the art market. On the other side 'media-mystic' is an integral part of cultural productions of all sorts and formats - but it's important not to take this too seriously. I cannot believe the market prices at this moment - these are 'day dreams' to me. Indeed I need theory as existential tool to dismantle, to unpack, to unfold, what's going on - to be aware what role art and culture play in constructing societal and political hegemonies for example. And sure not everyone is interested in demystification; actually you can get quite into some 'shit' for it. Seth Siegelaub at one moment did not want to be part of this agenda anymore and left this setting.

PON: Do you think a 'curated exhibition' can be a work of art in itself?

UMB: I must admit I don't care much if something is called art or not. Why is it important to label something as art? What would it imply to claim an exhibition as piece of art?

PON: Do you think we should evaluate what good or bad curating is? How would you describe a 'good' curated art exhibition?

UMB: Gosh, another of these unnecessary categories. What is good or what is bad anyway? (Laughs) Last year I saw a show here in London called 'Bad Painting', including actually fantastic paintings. These categories are so subjective and vague, so we can waste a good deal of time looking into them then never coming to a conclusion. There are more interesting questions to enrich our perception of exhibitions, of art and culture. I go more with what I consider relevant, necessary, what forces me to think and to reconsider, rather than wondering about good or bad.

PON: There is also a difference between as to whether something is perhaps good or bad for culture and something which is good or bad within itself and I suppose that is what I am touching on. I mean do we need another 'Utopia Station?' I mean is there some way of evaluating beyond the media, is there some way of evaluating if it is a useful exhibition?

UMB: 'Utopia Station' in the context of the 'Venice Biennale' posed a number of interesting questions. How do we read an exhibition, seen through art history versus social history etc? Pierre Bourdieu would have come to a different result than Rosalind Krauss, as would Chantal Mouffe or Jaques Rancière. Seen from a post-colonial or feminist point, take Stuart Hall or Linda Nochlin, their evaluations would be all different and all of them would be relevant and revealing as they share an in-depth interest in exhibitions and their implications, but using various magnifying glasses. It is tantalising to have a combination of reflections from different points of view, so it's a challenge to create an artwork or an exhibition etc. and to 'attract' such 'evaluators' to engage. Well, and then there are other expectations to exhibitions from politicians etc., regions, and towns. They evaluate usefulness under a complete different filter - take 'Documenta' from an economical point of view. Former mayor of Kassel and German Minister of Finance, Manfred Eichel stated once that each 'D-Mark' that is invested in 'Documenta' generates sixteen 'D-Mark' for the city's economy.

PON: One of the criticisms of 'Documenta 11' was although from a positive point of view it was a good idea to have these five platforms for discussion, but on another level it created a certain level of elitism, because ultimately one couldn't actually go to all these platforms. OK, you could purchase the publications afterwards, but in terms of the individual experience of the actual discursive events happening in five different places around the world, there were obviously people who are not as mobile as others and therefore couldn't have access to all these places of discussion. Is this a fair criticism?

UMB: Even not all the 'Documenta 11' curators could go. What is elitist or exclusive is the dominant and powerful art market of the West and

'Documenta' as all large-scale exhibitions play their role in that. The situation has opened up, but in a very controlled way. It was important to leave the context, the large scale, and the media attention to have the freedom to engage in the issues we wanted to raise. Take 'Créolité and Créolisation', that was even an intimate workshop gathering practitioners closely involved with this specific discourse. It was important that this took place at a location, where this discourse is embedded. The intention was to go to a context, where thinkers such as Jean Bernabé generated this discourse. And by the way not everyone can afford or gets a visa to come to Germany to see 'Documenta'. In New Delhi 300 or 400 people attended each session, and a number of listeners came from other towns in India. In Lagos, the majority of speakers were intellectuals of African origin or living in Africa. To call this move to decentralise, what Okwui Enwezor and Sarat Maharaj called 'Thinking and doing Documenta 11', elitist or exclusive, one should reflect who says this where. One week in Venice costs more than to fly to the Caribbean, to India or Lagos. And the critics claiming this usually have the right passports to go on these journeys.

PON: One of my experiences of 'Documenta 11' was that when you arrive everybody was in a rush to see things quickly, but after the first day you realise that people who were not used to slowing down at such events were actually being forced to do so because of the nature of the work, which is then followed by an engagement with this different pace, because there is no alternative but to behave in that way with the work on display. You couldn't just rush around and I think maybe this was because of the presence of different temporal spaces in the one site?

UMB: You were just mentioning the platforms that got critiqued claiming not everybody could go. But who can watch a 36 hour-long film by Jeff Guys? It runs in the same space you are in, but still it's exclusive by its sheer length. We have to accept we perceive fragmented. It's not so important that we see everything, it's important that certain issues, positions, perspectives get a presence in a context that includes them in certain reading, inscribing them in (art) histories that are exclusive themselves. Who is able to read all

the books in a library? Universalism is finished. This was one message 'Documenta 11' tried to get across.

PON: I read that you talked about 'Documenta' very much as a canon and that it was important to include works from beyond the West and inscribe this evidence into the canon. If 'Documenta 11' was and is the canon, what does it say about cultural activity today?

UMB: One aspect was, like I said before, about this cultural amnesia, to make left out positions visible. We were as well criticised that the average age of the contributors to 'Documenta 11' was too high. Many biennials introduce younger artists, and sure we all are interested in emerging art, but isn't it equally emerging, which artists, what positions we have not reflected although they have been around for quite a bit? Take Dieter Roth, but then to show it along with Ivan Kozaric: both considered the studio of the artist as the place where art happens, to put it in short. Although almost the same age, Roth is known and Kozaric is rather unknown in the West, and it's interesting to see both within the context of the same show, especially to discuss the differences. Take Chohreh Feyzdjou or Georges Adéagbo, whose practises are relevant to art history, important to reflections about imperial archives, the struggle of cultural identity etc. to introduce them along with important protagonists more known in the West that allows another review, reading of all of them. Or discuss Park Fiction, who engages with a specific local community in Hamburg along with the *Bataille Monument* of Thomas Hirschhorn, who situated this work within a local community in Kassel. They might look similar at first hand, but they follow quite different agendas, are almost opposing each other. To allow the audience to see this difference, to encourage the audience to look deeper,to understand exactly what makes this position different, still giving them equal presence within 'Documenta 11' it's not about who is better, who does right, rather than giving a wider audience the chance to understand the diversity of artistic practices. It's not the medium alone, it is the emerging message we were equally interested in. Le Groupe Amos from Kinshasa and Huit Facettes from Dakar are both groups whose work is interfering in local societal circumstances but doing this in quite different ways. What was a reaction from some Western critics? This does not look like what they expect from African art.

There was a suspicion that we - the curators - 'Westernised' these artists, told them how to show their work, as if they would need that.

PON: In terms of curating the 'Berlin Biennial' for contemporary art, how much of an influence or an impact was working on 'Documenta 11'?

UMB: First of all, as co-curators we were quite privileged to see so much material from all over the world, to be part of ongoing intense debates over years working on 'Documenta 11'. And sure this experience, this knowledge had an impact for the 3rd 'Berlin Biennial', although I simply didn't have the time and same number of staff we had to develop 'Documenta 11'. There is no other art exhibition comparable to that scale and dimension. It's a shift to go back to 'normal' conditions, which means a lack of time, to small budgets, etc. I indeed regret that I haven't had the time to research and to travel to Eastern Europe for example, as so much has changed there since the fall of the 'Iron Curtain' and as the fall of the Berlin Wall, which was a main reference for the 3rd 'Berlin Biennial'. 'Documenta 11' forced me, coming from feminist theories, to engage in post-colonial discourses, what allowed me to compare shared structural problems. Having such debates and discussion on an everyday basis was quite challenging and the big gain of such a team constellation. To develop a still large format such as the 'Berlin Biennial' as its main curator, to feel the pressure of the overall responsibility for the exhibition, the publications, the PR etc. on your shoulders was on one side challenging, but it created as well a situation of stress, that I never felt with 'Documenta 11'. I had a great team to work with, half of them joining 3rd 'Berlin Biennial' from 'Documenta 11', otherwise we would have never managed it. As mentioned earlier I rather work collaboratively and I had invited cultural producers to engage each with a specific facet of the 'New German Capital' Berlin, but there was not much time to communicate with each other on the same day-to-day rhythm we had with 'Documenta 11'. They developed each a 'hub' on one specific topic independent from each other. These thematic 'hubs' 'Migration', 'Urban Conditions', 'Sonic Scapes', 'Fashions and Scenes' and 'Other Cinemas' created essential discursive densities to force a specific contextualisation of the other works, positions exhibited. The reception, especially the German press, of 3rd 'Berlin Biennial' was rather harsh, and to a certain extent it felt that it was not only

addressing me as the Artistic Director of the 'Berlin Biennial', but as well as it seems like a late pay back to me as a co - curator of 'Documenta 11'. It is quite healthy to be back on your own in the front fires (laughs).

PON: Obviously it has had an impact on your current activities, but what have you learnt from Berlin?

UMB: It was a good experience to work again in Germany after many years abroad and even 'Documenta 11' was to a certain extent 'exterritorial'. The 3rd 'Berlin Biennial' offered the chance to reconnect to other cultural developments, political activities in the country I am personally most connected, and the country I can vote. And for sure the fact that I was a native and not a foreign curator influenced the tone of my curatorial concept and the reactions in the press in reverse. A critic of the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* suggested that I should change profession and become an activist. I took it as a compliment, but he missed that there is quite a different reality of direct action and the critical reflection of societal developments in the more safe havens of cultural institutions, but yes - I see them as intertwined in their efforts, but the parameters of action and reception are very different. In some way curating for me is like producing theory with other means as a tool to reflect society.

PON: Although you have worked within institutions, whether those institutions are actual physical or permanent buildings and structures, or institutions such as 'Documenta' or Berlin which are institutions in another way, you seem to have retained a certain form of independence within that, has this been something that you have struggled with or do you find the space for negotiation within the projects themselves?

UMB: Not to become too comfortable in a situation is important for me and usually that implies you can't stay too long at one place. But I have worked five years directing the programme at Künstlerhaus Stuttgart, and at the Academy of Fine Arts Vienna, I am teaching now since more than nine years. But at one moment one has to call it a day, if one knows the situation too well from the inside, it includes

the danger of feeling a bit too safe and tends to become a bit lazy. One eventually looses this antenna one needs to survive in more tense and alien situations, the careful eye, the curiosity detecting new territories. The surely unpleasant feeling of alienation creates somewhat the necessary distance to be even able to reflect. If you are too much involved in a context that could get lost. And once in a while it's healthy to destroy your own reputation, so people stay interested and awake with what you do.

PON: To reinvent something else?

UMB: Yes, why not? I do not think the same like some years ago - thank god we are able to learn, to enrich our knowledge - and yes, therefore once in a while it's necessary we reinvent our perspectives and positions. But to come back to what we talked about earlier on, I am not against working continuously in the same context. At Künstlerhaus Stuttgart for example it was great to develop a programme over such a time span and by doing this, investing in a community of shared interest, rather than an ever-changing audience. I consider my five years in this institution as one project stretched out over time. If you work on a biennial in eight months, it's a different pace; the intensity is in the spatial extraction, while the first way of working expands its intension over time. Museums are wonderful tools as well, if one is allowed to work really with the very notion of the museum. My interest in the museum descends from a theoretical point of view: everything needs to be reactivated, reinvented once in a while otherwise it looses its impact.

PON: Was the publication *New Institutionalism*, a way of looking at the changing role of institutions, particularly in terms of the different types of temporalities that people like Charles Esche or Maria Lind, or Catherine David have tried at their respective institutions in recent years?

UMB: For *New Institutionalism*, the first issue of the Office for Contemporary Art Norway's (OCA) periodical *Verkstedt* I was only the publisher. It was OCA's curator Jonas Ekeberg who wanted to focus on this topic, he commissioned the authors, and for sure I am supportive to reflect different approaches to running art institutions. But I am

sceptical if this could function within existing museum and 'Kunstverein' structures and their audiences, and be still sympathetic to older models such as Malraux's 'maison de la culture' or the ICA in London. The intertwinement of formats is rather difficult to practise in institutions that serve particular audiences. During the time Fareed Armaly was Artistic Director of Künstlerhaus Stuttgart he created a kind of curatorial texture, a fabric of various formats, but even in an artist-run space this created hostility, although it was a great programme and an intellectual inspiration to follow the steps.

PON: Do you think we need more post-graduate curatorial training programmes?

UMB: We need more opportunities to seriously research and reflect on exhibitions, curatorial practices, and the 'power of displays'. The library at Bard Museum of Curatorial Studies started a wonderful archive collecting material on various programmatic of different selected art institutions and collects archives of freelance curators. That is a great resource and this is definitely something we need. In general I have mixed feelings about the increasing number of curatorial educations, but it really depends on what they have on their agenda and curriculum. The maybe oldest programme of that kind - the Whitney Independent Study Program - is very different from curatorial courses that mainly look into institutional management and the handling of artworks. Interesting curators often descend from completely different contexts. In Vienna at the Academy of Fine Arts we teach curatorial, gender and post-colonial studies, but not directly for curators. It's mainly the art students we address, as we are an art academy, that attend and some of them started afterwards working in the curatorial field. Curatorial practice belongs into a curriculum of an artist, and I prefer this mixed group of students. But I completely agree that there should be programmes that critically engage in curatorial practices shaping future curators, but they should not limit their focus on contemporary art, as it's mostly the case, but address exhibition making as such, and reflect the role all museums play in constructing the 'imperial archive' for example.

PON: Do you think that these courses have impacted upon curatorial upon practice or the perception of the curator within cultural

production since 1987 when Le Magasin opened the first course in Europe?

UMB: Oh, the first round of participants at Le Magasin's course was an interesting mix of artists, future curators and gallery-makers. Then it became a bit silent and under the leadership of Catherine Queloz and Liliane Schneiter it regained relevance with a new approach and a new structure. Catherine Queloz herself participated in the Whitney Program. Sure even for those who might engage in official cultural politics, it might be good to understand the larger political context they operate within, to eventually distance themselves from the instrumentalisation that is often implied even if not intended. It's obvious that especially cultural politics often lack vision and position, and a more technocratic approach dominates the management of culture rather to see it as a tool for critical production and reflection of society, their development and needs. Nevertheless there is a number of very interesting people, that run institutions with a Gramscian approach. But the pressure that politicians and the media put on major cultural institutions let me doubt if all the critical thinking that we try to support as educators will be able to occupy space, to claim territory within these establishments that tend more and more towards populist programmes.

PON: Do you need any more biennials?

UMB: Well - this is not so easy to answer, as it seems. The problem I have with the biennial boom is that biennials replace a lot of very interesting and more challenging exhibition formats. Thematic exhibitions such as for example Kasper König's 'Westkunst' or 'Von Hier Aus', became a rare exception, or take the early shows by Harald Szeemann, such as 'Der Hang zum Gesamtkunstwerk' they had a big impact on me as an art student. Shows researching a certain topic over a period of time, for example Okwui Enwezor's 'The Short Century. Independence and Liberation movements in Africa 1945-1994', are usually way more specific and therefore produce a more relevant discourse than the majority of the biennials. On the other side, the biennial is often a model to inscribe so called 'peripheries' into the hegemonic Western art discourse and market. But again one has to

differentiate if a biennial got founded from the political side or if it's a private initiative, if the intention is to counter official agendas etc. And sure in some cities, countries, and regions a biennial can be a very useful tool to create visibility, and to force the foundation of new art institutions and to support the local art scene. Therefore I cannot simply say no to your question, it really depends on each context.
People starting biennials seek usually as well for international funding, often from other national support structures such as AFAA in France, the British Council, the Dutch Mondriaan Foundation and especially the Scandinavians have established strong new models of supporting 'their' artists. Working myself in such an institution with the Office for Contemporary Art Norway I asked myself if we do not produce new hegemonies, new forms of cultural colonialism. Often well intended, it stays a tricky issue. But I definitely would like to see more specifically developed shows particularly when they happen on a larger scale. It became normal to expect from curators to 'deliver' a biennial including publications, active website, visitor programme, lecture series and side events within ten to eight-months, often lacking sufficient funding. These support the tendency to commission biennial experienced curators rather than giving other curators a chance that would suit the context of the locality and give them time to shape something specific. Do we need more fairs? Do we need more museums? Do we need more art? Maybe we should renegotiate first what role art has in society today and which role art could take instead.

PON: How important is the role of criticism to your practice as a curator?

UMB: I personally need constructive criticism. I do not understand why this is considered something heavy or negative, dry, grey, pc and all the other cheering words brought up when you mention the words 'criticism', 'theory' etc. Currently I hardly see serious criticism if it comes to exhibitions, instead it seems more en vogue for art critics to compete with each other in writing polemics. Time pressure and the little money involved in art criticism do not help either. The fast turnover of biennales, fairs etc. demands equal fast writing. Therefore as a curator one has to create a discursive space to

encourage the audience to read an exhibition in a critical way by themselves.

PON: This is one of the reasons I asked the question earlier: do you think it would be a good thing if we could evaluate what good or bad curating is?

UMB: Again, who determines, what is good or bad be it in art, or in curating. There is what we call 'schlechtes Handwerk'. I could not believe that we got criticised by the press and colleagues alike that 'Documenta 11' was too well, too perfectly installed. It's a given for me and many of my colleagues to treat artworks in a responsible manner, with respect. To reach visibility, compete for publics, for presence in art magazines, all of that creates a pressure that leads to 'fast' curating and spectacular projects, and a tendency to populism in a number of exhibitions and institutions. This needs to be addressed. It's healthy to have a critical reflection of your own practice and to say eventually no to projects, but if you stay too long out of the 'circuit' you might be out for good. That counts for artists and curators alike. I enjoy going back to small scale, more peripheral working contexts, but I am aware that this hardly counts. The tendency for rankings: the best 100 artists, the best galleries, the most influential curators, the most important collectors etc. leaves its marks in the system and within yourself. I wish more people would experience how much pleasure it is to get a sense of complexity, how revealing it is to dismantle one-dimensional histories and that critical thinking and theory are tools for empowerment.

END OF TAPE

JOHN MILLER

New York, 12-11-05

PAUL O'NEILL: You wrote an essay about curating for Ute Meta Bauer's *Meta: New Spirit in Curating 2* back in '92. Can you remember how curating was perceived at that particular moment in time?

JOHN MILLER: It came out of a panel with the same title at the Kunstlerhaus Stuttgart. I do remember that Colin Deland was there - even though he wasn't a curator per se. He was a dealer. He gained a lot of attention because he had used an art fair, the Cologne art fair, as a kind of platform to make a statement. Instead of showing work in his booth, he set up a video monitor that showed just a fireplace. The source of that image was WOR-TV, which used to have an odd custom of just showing a yule log burning all day long on New Year's Day. Colin's gesture had the effect of renouncing or seeming to renounce financial interests. It also seemed to hint that showing art in art fairs is a kind of 'potboiler' situation. Over the long-term, though, it more than paid back because there was a gain in cultural capital or symbolic capital. Coming at the end of the eighties, the panel seemed to reflect frustration with the blockbuster exhibitions that had come to rule that decade. I remember that the panel almost coincided with the 'Metropolis' exhibition in Berlin, which even then seemed to be a very dated kind of statement. The inclusion of Colin on the panel typifies, at least in part, the shift that was going on.

For my part, I spoke about being an artist-critic and telling this story: For a few years before I'd been writing reviews regularly for *Artforum,* once, I reviewed someone whose work was all about serial killers. He handled the theme in a very corny way, i.e., because serial killers are dangerous, this implied his art was also dangerous. That actually spooked my wife, who didn't want me to write the piece. Then, after the review came out, I did get a crank phone call that went like this: 'Is this John Miller?' And I said, 'Yeah'. Then the caller just said, *'Artist-critic?'* then hung up. That was supposed to be the ultimate putdown. But, did you have a specific point you wanted me to speak to?

PON: Not really, but in your later essay 'The Psychology of the Mega-Exhibition: The Show You Love to Hate' you wrote about the idea of the mega-exhibition as an ideological institution and that the explicit role of these shows is to offer a comprehensive survey or artworks on a demographic basis and that came in response to Jan Höet's 'Documenta', which seemed to be the manifestation of an eighties mentality in curating and one of the things that was interesting about that text in particular was that you suggested that criticism towards curatorial practice should not be based on the process or the selection that the curator makes, but on the ideology of the institution itself. Do you think the ideology of the institution has been critiqued, whether that be 'Documenta' or Venice or any other large-scale exhibitions or mega-exhibitions, do you think that any work has been done in that area?

JM: Both Catherine David's and Okwui Enwezor's 'Documentas' were extremely cognisant of the exhibition itself as an ideological manifestation. Both also had a de-emphasised aesthetic quality, which is kind of a red herring. David ended up ruffling feathers because the only art historian she invited to write for the catalogue was Benjamin Buchloh. Everyone else came from other disciplines. So, yeah, I do think a lot of positive work has been done. Venice, I'm not so sure about; I just haven't seen the shows.

Another factor is the whole second generation of institutional critique coming to fruition. Even though there is a sense that it's over, really out of fashion, I think the impact has been big. Artists and institutions have become more aware of their roles and their interdependency. Opposed to all this is David Hickey. His formulation, 'the therapeutic institution', appeals to the old model of the artist as individual creator... The very phrase 'therapeutic institution' is meant to disparage therapy and psychoanalysis. However, you could turn that around and say he's invoking a highly simplistic notion of the individual as a unified 'self'. Despite Hickey's popularity, institutional critique has been more or less embraced as a

productive engagement with institutions, i.e., as a way to help institutions function better as institutions.

PON: How do you think contemporary art curation has developed since the late eighties, and are there any dominant forms that have emerged?

JM: The way I see it, the dominant problem pertains to Marcuse's notion of 'repressive tolerance'. One way to get around the notion of artistic quality is to treat the exhibition as a kind of archive. This has led to problems of public address: who constitutes the public, what is their relation to exhibition-as-archive, how publicly recognisable and identifiable is the exhibition itself? Looking again to David and Enwezor: both presented so much information that it was impossible for any one individual to see everything - all the panels, all the side discussions, in many cases even all the work that was presented in a given 'Documenta'. So this, in effect, fragments the audience and along with it, critical discourse. If no one has a comprehensive view of the entire project, can it truly ever enter discourse? Of course, the curators never intended to repress the positions or the work they championed, but if you create a flood of information, you also have to think about efficacy.

PON: In defense of 'Documenta 11', Ute Meta Bauer and Okwui Enwezor have both defended the kind of over-layering of the project and the selection of such a large number of projects by articulating that 'Documenta' is a representational vehicle for the canon, is that they wanted to incorporate practices which were not easy to experience as a spectator in the 'Documenta' context, so their willingness or their wish or their desire to actually show all these practices meant that of course you weren't going to be able to see it all, and that was ultimately the intention, but that was also their defense against that critique of the excess nature of the project.

JM: Even though all the impulses that have fed into that are progressive, the public recognition of the event, or lack thereof, remains a problem. So, at what point does the discourse

surrounding it become incoherent? It's been further exacerbated by the forms of work that artists themselves pursue, namely time-based works. The minute you step into time-based work it creates a ceiling in terms of how much any one person can actually see. I think Stan Douglas' video installation, *Suspiro* (2002/2003) directly addressed this question. He used a kind of recombinant computer-editing program to structurally regenerate fairy tales. It took me a long time to realise that this quasi-story could spin on ad infinitum. Moreover, the whole production had a kind of suspect PBS-look and it referenced Vladimir Propp. No one ever saw even Douglas' piece in its entirety - not even the artist, himself. Ultimately, he seemed to be putting that problematic of incoherence at the very core of that piece. It put me in the position of having to decide when I had enough, even though I never felt that I ever saw enough to get a handle on it. Only later, through secondary information, did I learn what was going on there. So, that to me is the primary problem facing curators of big exhibitions. After that, I suppose there's the globalisation of the 'biennial complex'. The relationship of the biennial to the world's fair needs to be rethought in some serious way.

PON: Ivo Mesquita and also Jessica Bradley have argued that one of the reasons why we have a general increase in biennials is that they actually fit well within the articulation of globalisation in the sense that they are fragmented and they are inclusive but that inclusiveness can actually shift at any moment in time, that notion of inclusiveness is representative of a more general form of cultural tourism as something upon which globalisation depends in order for it to actually reach its moment of fulfillment.

JM: For 'emerging economies', biennials can officially ratify a national ascension into the liberal democratic arena. Even though this is highly symbolic, it carries a lot of weight. In tandem with this is the growth of the art fair. I think the pre-eminence of art fairs obliterates the solo show as an artistic proposition. Ironically, Mary

Kelly once argued that the solo exhibition was the primary way to instantiate authorship, and she meant that critically. The art fair radically erodes even this condition, leaving nothing in its place.

PON: On another level the art fairs are adopting certain strategies used by biennials, like the platforms for discussion, let's have some talks, the discussions and temporary projects at art fairs such as those that are part of the 'Frieze Art Fair'.

JM: That's kind of a band-aid approach, but I'd trace it back to Colin's counter-legitimising gesture that ultimately yielded a surplus of cultural capital. Curiously, if he hadn't been reaping this benefit, the gesture wouldn't haven't been funny. I expect the 'platform for discussion' approach to intensify. It's hard to imagine a more un-funny prospect. Yet to imagine institutional critique-style intervention seems ever harder. There must be plenty of examples but the only one that comes to my mind is Coco Fusco's radical intervention at 'ARCO'.

PON: And more recently Martha Rosler gave a guided tour as part of the Frieze Projects where she gave a tour of the infrastructure or backrooms of the fair, so people who went on the tour were actually introduced to the accountant and the cleaners and so on, where the running of the fair itself became exposed during this tour. So it may be exposing everything else that happens at the fair whilst the fair is actually on, but it's a kind of soft critique rather than a hard critique, where an artist is actually using the structure or the infrastructure in order to actually produce a piece of work that may be enabled by that structure but actually trying to allow the potentiality for it to be criticised as opposed to it being criticised.

JM: That has much in common with Andrea Fraser's New Museum performance, which was called *Museum Highlights*. A precendent for that was Dick Miller's Fluxus gallery tours. He took a group of friends around Soho galleries; they ignored the art and looked at the light fixtures and things like that.

PON: You've called Jan Höet 'an abstract expressionist' for the nature of his controversial hanging with his 'Documenta 9'. Do you think that there's any other art-ism, which could be potentially connected to certain contemporary curators of the generation of the nineties?

JM: Hmm, 'global something'. Well, I mean if there is a logic, it would be something along the lines of the 'politics of publicity', to paraphrase Alex Alberro's book on the network aspect of conceptualism. Hans Ulrich Obrist's curatorial strategies would relate to that. And what I liked about Alberro's book was that it was the connection he made between developmental stages of capitalism and the particular aesthetic that Siegelaub promoted, namely how it was driven less by dematerialisation than it was by 'informatization', a more efficient mode of capitalisation.

PON: In *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls 'amnesia' towards exhibitionary display practices of the past. This is also something that Brian O'Doherty called a 'radical forgetfulness' in art history, in his *Inside The White Cube*. Do you think that we suffer from a certain repressed history in our contemporary curatorial discourse?

JM: In short, yes. I'd even say that historiography itself is predicated on a degree of repression. But, perhaps to cite an example where the curators were working with the best intentions: The Brooklyn Museum's re-hanging of its American collection. The installation derived from practices like Group Material's and Fred Wilson's. The museum, in fact, had even invited Fred Wilson to take charge of part of the installation, but I don't think he was able to do it. In any event, the curators tried to show the entire periods without a hierarchy between fine and applied arts. Each of the rooms had a given period style. The curators also went out of their way to make the exhibits user-friendly, even putting sofas from ABC Carpet in every room. But the downside of all this is that it frustrates a scholarly grasp of the art. I found myself wondering what if I were on a PhD on American landscape or something. Someone told me the museum re-hung the

American collection in a conventional manner. So, I guess my point is that no practice can avoid the radical forgetfulness of repression. But, the other point is that, ultimately, it doesn't make sense to institutionalise a gesture. The power of Group Material's and Fred Wilson's derived from intervention, not institutionalisation.

PON: In your essay for Jens Hoffmann's, *The Next Documenta Should be Curated by and Artist* you emphasised the momentum of the idea of the 'artist-curator' having already been built up through the practice of artists linked with institutional critique like Fred Wilson, Group Material, Louise Lawler, Julie Ault et al in the 1980s. Do you think that curating can be a form of artistic practice?

JM: Certainly. Of course, I think something would be lost if curating across the board categorically became artistry, and I'm sure that most curators would not want to call their activity artistic. Most operate with a different view towards history than artists typically do. Most exhibitions begin with a kind of thesis of sorts as a point of departure, while artists as a rule don't have the equivalent of a thesis for their work or, if one appears that it's the result of a working procedure. So, I wouldn't do away with the distinction. One funny thing that came out at Ute's panel in '92 was that Corinne Deseren charged Colin de Land with being an artist. Although he was horrified when that came up, he had, in fact, worked as an artist under at least two pseudonyms: first with Richard Prince under the pseudonym John Dogg, and second, alone, with a similar kind of name - Jay St. Bernard. So, to go back to that panel, Colin's gesture turned the art fair into a particular kind of theatre: something not so far removed from the way Jan Höet used artworks as raw material. Both revolve around a kind of ready-made principle.

PON: Jonathan Watkins calls curated exhibitions akin to Duchamps' 'readymade aided artworks' in 1987, or that they could be depending on the way the curators hung the work or lit the work or display the work, whilst more recently Robert Storr refused to call curating a medium, because it ultimately empowered the curator to call themselves an

artist, a position which he believed the critics had enjoyed for a long period of time, the potentiality that the critic could be an artist. Do you think that that's a danger?

JM: Well maybe just to say that the exhibition is material. But, after all, Rob Storr began as a painter, not a curator. It depends. If exhibitions *always* had to serve as material for something else, that would be awful. But, to backtrack to the idea of the exhibition as ready-made, if you recall the genealogy of Duchamp's urinal, that's the inception of institutional critique.

PON: To go back again, if Ute Meta Bauer's organised panel discussion in '92 and its subsequent publication was an attempt to identify what 'the new spirit in curating' was at the time, in the late eighties, early nineties, what do you think would be identified as the new so-called new spirit in curating?

JM: It's hard to say. Much of it seems entrepreneurial. On the other hand, there's a lot I don't know, especially what's going on with younger artists' curatorial projects. In that vein, Dave Muller's 'Three-day Weekend' project comes to mind. Informal interventions like this seem like a kind of counterpoint. Ultimately, sheer scale has changed everything. Even since the 90s, the art scene has continued to explode. That fragments the audience even more. For instance, it used to be possible to see every gallery show that might be up in Manhattan, but those days are long gone.

PON: Do you think there's a dominant perception of what the new spirit in curating has become? Interestingly many of the key terms that you have just used like the global, or entrepreneurial or the issue of scale would again be reasons why curators have become much more visible in the 1990s than ever before and how the issue of curating has become more visible within contemporary art discourse.

JM: Well, curators have become more celebrities in their own right. Before, it was kind of a bookish sort of profession. One of the funny

things that happened at the 'Lyon Biennial' was that all the curators modelled a Hermés collection. It was meant to be light-hearted, but part of the humor derived from an over-determined situation.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

STÉPHANIE MOISDON

Paris, 18-04-05

PAUL O'NEILL: Can you tell me about your first curatorial project?

STÉPHANIE MOISDON: My first curatorial project, in fact I arrived by chance in this context because I have a very universal education. I am coming from semiology and cinema research, and I was doing my thesis about the space between the images and related fields. And at this time it was '89, there was one show, which I think is still very interesting, a prospective show called 'Passage a l'Image' in the Pompidou Centre and the director of my thesis was one of the curators at the Pompidou, and he was coming from a background in philosophy and semiology and more precisely Lacanian psychology. He asked me to write some text for the show, because it was very precisely the subject of my thesis, and I stayed at the Pompidou Centre for seven years. I was supposed to stay three months. Because for me it was one of the most interesting contexts, maybe the last utopian context for me, with all these crossovers between design and scientific research and architecture and cinema and music and it was a real public space. I would say that it's now over.

PON: Would you say it was very much like a laboratory at the time?

SM: It was still a laboratory. And I'm really interested by the question of the dispositive in Lacanian terms, and the question of the public sphere. Then I decided to stay and to do every year in the media and video department - and it was not organised at all at this time - to do every year a sort of like small exhibition or festival showing the last tendencies, last trends in new media video. And it was very prospective at this time, and not articulated. Later, I did this video collection book after the Museum of Modern Art, and it was like a sort of non-territory for me. I did not know anything about video - video history. And I did several events at the Pompidou Centre. I was twenty-two or something like that when I arrived and when I decided to do my first show as an independent curator it was in Geneva, in Le Magasin, Grenoble. I was pretty young and naïve but I did sort of like the strange mix between psychoanalysis, science and art around the question of the self and the title was 'Auto-Reverse' and there was a seminar in a very close house in Geneva where I invited psychoanalysts from Chimére and some scientists, using images, using also devices and artists and curators. And after the second part

was a show in Le Magasin in Grenoble, and the third part, considered really as one of the chapters of the exhibition, was a publication in Chimére. This is the first show that I can identify. And it took something like three years to do it. This is for me the most relevant and I would like to really work in this process during years, and to add and to subtract elements. But I never think in terms of any fixed exhibition like a terminal object.

PON: And how would you compare the process, the curatorial process in producing that exhibition and say a more recent exhibition 'Before The End' at Le Consortium in Dijon?

SM: I think that 'Before The End' is very precisely asking the same questions in the first exhibition I did, and it's about having a starting point when you decide to produce an object - why do you decide to produce another object, if it's the third object or not, if it has to do with you or the others. The same always interests me, it's a kind of position, and it's like the question of the interval. I'm following the same obsession since years in fact. And the question asked with 'Before The End' is very precisely this one. And when you start, decide to be an artist, it's a real choice, it's a real position, but what do you project? Now what it's like, the fantasy, also reality. How do you take place? How do you construct your own narration, your own communication, your own, you project this future or this present? And I think that most of the artists, what is interesting for me was the artists much more than in literature or cinema, I think that the artists are really haunted by the same question, the question of the present - not the past, not the future but the present.

PON: I mean there seems to be two, from what I understand, there seem to be two parallel shows almost, curatorial projects within 'Before The End', which is kind of looking at early works by conceptual artists like Olivier Mosset and then a selection that you made of artists, kind of post-conceptually, contemporaneously. And were you conscious of those two parallel kinds of curatorial models, and why, what was the overlap to them?

SM: You know it was a game not a joke between Olivier and me and all

the other artists. We played together, sometimes a very tricky game, with a lot of lies and something between truth and lie. And this is a kind of hidden part in the show but that you can feel, because it's a show that you have to read first, which is also very important but linked to the conceptual art history, like when you enter, in place of the labels you have the text produced by the artists themselves about this first time, their memory, not everything but part of it is totally faked. First of all naturally because of what is lost and you cannot remember and they have to reconstruct this memory. And sometimes because they are not so proud about it, and they have to like rebuild the whole thing. And with Olivier Mosset, when we started to discuss this show it was always in two parts, the end and the beginning, and we were very conscious about the perversion of the game and all our process was to push this perversion as far as possible. And at the end, I can tell you for example that the part of Olivier in fact I had to do it, because for him it was not interesting to do it as a curator, he just wanted to discuss with me about the perspectives and the ideas. He was not so interested in doing the selection of artists and for him the ideas were much more important.

PON: And how would you describe your curatorial practice as distinct from other curators?

SM: From other curators, you mean how can I compare my own practice? I think that most of the time curators are not curating, they are administrating. They are like sometimes very good managers, they are doing fantastic work in terms of communication and funding, they are putting the name and their face everywhere. It's extraordinarily self-promotive, but I am not interested. For me it's conceptual, otherwise I stop. I'm a really mediocre administrator; I hate this kind of thing. I mean I can do it, I am doing it of course, I'm obliged, but I don't see any interest to continue this practice, just like being a translator. I am not interested at all. I can see some examples. For example I really like what Le Consortium are doing, because I think that it's one of the most challenging places of the last twenty years. I really like the work of Bob Nickas. It seems that it's always risky, it's always smart but not really smart, like it has to do with its self, it's sometimes very light and very disinvolved maybe snobby and it's always coming from a lot of very

deep problematic.

PON: I interviewed Bob Nickas in New York recently and he said that one of the things that distinguish him from other curators is that he defines himself as being promiscuous with art. Would you say that you're promiscuous with art?

SM: Yes. Yes. No it's a very good definition.

PON: I mean you've been curating for say fifteen, sixteen years - do you think there are any dominant forms within curatorial practice that have developed during that period?

SM: Unfortunately not really. There are not like... What I notice all the time is that curators are not really working on the language for an exhibition. An exhibition is a language. It's always a form of language that you have to investigate, to learn, or maybe not learn. So what happens in the last ten years is that we are not talking any more about it, there's a real confusion between exposing and curating. The biennials are much more important than any curatorial projects, and in the biennial, I'm very well placed to say it because I did a biennial and I did 'Manifesta', you're absolutely enabled to do a show, like to really work on the exhibition.

PON: For 'Manifesta 4', for which you co-curated, the term that was used to describe the curatorial strategy was 'Radical Transparency'. How did this 'radical transparency' present itself in 'Manifesta'?

SM: I cannot see any radical transparency in 'Manifesta'. Everything was organised in terms of geo-political strategies, and I think that this, like radical transparency, doesn't exist at all.

PON: That was the term that was used...

SM: This is... no but you see this is an implicit obligation of 'Manifesta'. You know you're working with 'Manifesta', it's very tricky because you're supposed to be working freely as a curator, because it's like the sort of a kingdom of the curator, but it's never the case. It's never the case because it's exactly like the Olympic

Games, you have to deal with a lot of implicit issues from the city, a city which like invested a lot of money with the Manifesta Foundation, with all the countries who are waiting for your venue and like your research and you're little bit obliged and to find the kind of balance between eastern and western like all these militarian strategies. But even if I'm using this kind of term, you can imagine that there is no like radical transparency, it's like just impossible to link the two terms.

PON: Because one of the terms that Seth Siegelaub used in the late sixties, early seventies, to describe the changing role of the curator during that period was 'demystification', and there's kind of, I suppose kind of linguistically there's certainly a co-relationship or a similarity between the idea of 'radical transparency' and 'demystification'. Do you think the term 'demystification' in relation to the role of the curator with the production of contemporary art exhibitions is still a valid term?

SM: But 'demystification' in comparison to what?

PON: What he meant was making visible the role played by curators within the production of the idea that is made manifest within the exhibition.

SM: I think that it's like… This is a very wrong orientation, because the most interesting curating is exactly the opposite. It's like, normally if you won't really like to do this job because of your own career, it's because you like the decorum, it's because you're fascinated by the décor, the set-up, the narrative organisation of the space. It's always a fiction. And I feel extremely sure. When I show something about the back of the décor, the background, it's even more fake. It's not for… like it's not for, it's not for showing and the process and the tools, and to work how it is. It's not for showing reality. There's a big difference between real and reality. The real is what you experience; the reality has absolutely no interest for me.

PON: What historical precedents, precursors or exhibitionary paradigms have been an influence on your practice?

SM: I was influenced not only by exhibitions, but also by theatre and by theatrical images. I am much more influenced by the film *The Trip*, by the split screens, rather than Harald Szeemann. But for me it has to do with also like this space, space and time, space and time and relation organisation. Now in terms of exhibitions that were strong. In the Pompidou Centre, because when you're like ten years old and you visit the Pompidou Centre you can imagine it's a fantastic feeling. But I remember very well the Soto piece in the Pompidou, and for me it was really a world. Yves Klein as a monographic example, because I am also very interested by the monographic exhibitions at the time, one of the most elegant exercises, and one of the most difficult. And maybe 'Post Human' also was sort of like a shock. I couldn't understand what we're seeing and it was not very clear for me but I remember that I bought a catalogue and I am still consulting the catalogue sometimes.

PON: I mean did you see 'Les Immateriaux'?

SM: I saw it and I know it was very interesting. You know I'm French, and there was always a controversy with Lyotard, and we have tendencies so I am much more on the side of Baudrillard. And for me with Baudrillard it's more interesting at this time really because I think that he had a sort of vision, anticipation vision, about like this world of communication and media.

PON: In her book *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls an historical 'amnesia' or a repressed history towards exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think that we have a repressed history of curating, and if so how do you think that curators could address that within exhibitions?

SM: I am not sure that it's true, because it's also a cliché today to always mention or quote people like El Lissitzky or the idea of the artist as the real inventor of the display or the story. It's interesting because I sort of observed recently, we are always a little bit saying the same thing at the same time, like we are like sometimes not very conscious like this, we are not very singular, yeah, in the same spirit and the same generation. And I would think

that at this time there's a very common cliché within the discourse saying that the artists are, these artists were the first curators and first inventing like something about the display whatever. And I even said many times that for me a good artist never needs, doesn't need a curator because he's like… and doesn't need a critic, because it's included in the package. Everything is like there already.

PON: Embodied in the practice?

SM: Yes, but I think that it's not true also, that's not true in fact. No it's very influential, for example the exhibition of Arman. It works as a sort of blind object, which works for me, and I even have a vision and I never saw any reproduction, any image of this show, but I have a vision of this show, and I know that I have reproduced it already. And it works exactly as a text can work.

PON: I mean how did being co-curator of something like 'Manifesta' affect your curatorial practice?

SM: Oh it's very interesting because it's about the alterity, but you know I never worked alone before I used to never work alone, and it is why I was chosen for 'Manifesta', but not in these terms because also I never work alone but I choose my colleagues when I decide to collaborate, like I was even in a collective called XN, sort of like a very exponential sort of very secret organisation, and it was working under this like secret organisation but it was with Lionel Bovier, Hans Ulrich Obrist and people like that, and we were always signing with XN, but it's normal also because like it's a romanticism when you're twenty-five or between twenty-five and thirty-five, it seems like it's a sort of utopia being together. And I changed a lot with 'Manifesta'. I change my mind a lot, yes. I will never accept this kind of collective practice… because it's not a collective practice. It's a game, a power, a force, you know and I always like to… You're much more territorialised when you're doing this kind of work with people you didn't choose than in like normal one, and for me this is a failure of this collectiveness. It's an absolutely artificial collectiveness in 'Manifesta'. But it's also interesting to think about it because you know that you have lost something.

PON: Do you think it dilutes your participation, dilutes your role?

SM: No you're much more losing than adding. Yeah you're losing radicality, you cannot take any risks because there is a problem of the responsibility. If you take a risk you're not alone. Then you cannot justify it, because there is not one voice but three, and the whole organisation behind. And for me politically it's very interesting because I discovered how dangerous this process was, because if I decide like to not show any woman artist, it's absolutely my choice, my responsibility. But when you are asked all the time about these kind of quota things, and we couldn't answer because politically it was impossible - it was not correct, and we had to build up this non-subjective voice, a sort of objective vision made by the three of us, like a robot.

PON: I mean do you think that the curator is a kind of author still?

SM: Yes. Hopefully, hopefully, yes, and I would really like to convince the others that they should be authors.

PON: And what kind of an author are you?

SM: Mm, I cannot write linear things, because I understood simply that I couldn't read linear things. I cannot read a novel anymore. Maybe sometimes, but when it's very deconstructed. Then I'm somewhere in-between the very theoretical approach of the 1980s and maybe a kind of essay language but very fragmented. In terms of structure I know that I'm not writing, yeah I cannot write a linear story.

PON: Can you tell me about the relationship between your work as an art critic and your curatorial practice?

SM: You know I will finish a book like in the *Press de Real* series soon, because it has to do with your question. It will be out in a few months, and it's a compilation of all my previous texts, and it's called *Stephanie Moisdon*, not because I'm like selfish or narcissistic, but because I think that it's a question of the name, of the signature is like one of the most important to me, really. And in fact, between the title of the text and the signature at the end, most

of the time you know that nobody, no one reads the text in-between, but there is this sort of like flash this title and the other flash with the signature and in-between there is a blank. And in this book I will try to like put all my dates, including the bad ones and the very bad ones sometimes. Normal. But I'm not being transparent, but to… exactly the opposite, for the idea is to take the story and to re-constructualise, like to write an introduction before any text and to say how it was done, if I can remember how it was paid in which conditions, for which reason I did accept it like, and where is the failure for me now. But again it's a fiction. It cannot be the truth, cannot be transparent.

PON: Maybe can you tell me a little bit about the relationship, the interdependent relationship between your work as an art critic then and your work as a curator?

SM: For me it's much more evident than for example my relation between critic and curator and also dealer with BDVideo. But between the exhibition work, the curatorial work and the textual work, for me there is no difference. It's exactly the same. It's what I discovered when I arrived in the Pompidou Centre, and you know I wanted to be a critic and I know that it's a bit ridiculous and a dying world, but I always wanted to be a critic, and I wanted to be a critic when I was ten and for me there's no difference. It's more complicated to link this activity to the BDV Agency, because there are a lot of conflicts. You know I'm working with the artists, with the galleries of course, with the market, and I'm part of the market, I'm part of the observers.

PON: So what was your thinking behind setting up your Bureau de Video?

SM: It was a critical project, but because we were not, we didn't want to be sellers or dealers or like, and we are not very professional in this work. It's not our pleasure. No we just wanted to ask the question of the multiple in this very precise context in the 1990s, and I think that maybe this question today is not so relevant anymore, but it was relevant. And the question of the decision, the distribution, and market logic, the art market logic, why when you

know that a video is only a multiple, it cannot be a master, it cannot be an original. Why and how the art market decided to deny like… to not take in consideration these new tools, these new like art materials and to do exactly the same with them as with the photography or like an object. And it was very interesting because it was like a big contradiction. We were really in the place of the contradiction and we really wanted just like to embrace this contradiction. The galleries were selling like at this time and it's even worse now than before, in three or four editions for example then, and it is a function of BDV was like why have only three in this format and how can you define that it's an installation or an original video. Which area are you deciding, this kind of thing. Then it was really like the function of BDV.

PON: I mean would you see that as a curatorial project?

SM: Yeah yeah yeah, and we did… our idea was not only like to distribute videos and also produce but also to invent new formats or new displays, to invent a some new and different contexts for watching videos and like or… We did many different things that I don't remember but we tried it. It was also an experimental place. We tried many things.

PON: You've just launched the new art magazine with Eric Troncy called *FROG*. How would you distinguish that as different from other existing art journals or art magazines?

SM: It's different because it's the one missing in France. Totally missing, there is nothing like it. That's why we decided to do it; we didn't want to be art for like to be publishers and that. I absolutely prefer being invited to write in an existing magazine and I don't have like this enterprise passion and it's a lot of work, a lot of organisation, if I can get rid of that I would be happy. But it's totally missing. And certainly we didn't analyse enough the reasons of the situation, but between *Art Press*, which has nothing to do with our generation and *Beaux Arts*, which is a sort of like a very promotional support, doing only reviews about exhibitions that will take place in three months and without any critical aspects so there is really nothing. It's not the case in the UK or the US, but here it

disappeared. But certainly some very like precise business, we don't know exactly why. But we decided to do it mainly because it doesn't exist. And we tried to work on many different details, like the place of the text, the place of the image, how we use the image, what is the function of the image, if it's not animating the page, if it's about showing something, if it's about exposing the work of the artist, or the artists themselves. How does it work, when it's an image, if it's a visual or a sign? Then we tried to de-articulate, deconstruct the machinery of the magazine, and to take every part of it from the cover to the table of content, how it works visually, how can you show or see the hierarchies and who is more important, the graphic designers, the artists, the authors, the artists? It's very interesting because again it's an organisation.

PON: I mean I know that even towards the end of the magazine there are some image only articles, so for example Gary Webb by Eric Troncy. What was your thinking behind this?

SM: The first part is about the reviews and it is working exactly at the opposite direction to normal, where reviews are usually at the end of the magazine. And here it's the most important voice, so we asked two different critics, sometimes most of the time, to write about the same exhibition and you have different points of view. Sometimes even we asked the artist himself to be his own critic, like to say exactly what he thinks about his own show. And then it's always an exhibition which was seen, like experienced, it's really like how to circulate, how to take place. And after you have like the interviews, this is academic but it was interesting sometimes, it was something simple. If there is something simple, for example we asked exactly the same questions to two collectors who are also psychoanalysts, and collecting conceptual art. And for thirty years they are working and collecting together, and they speak with the same voice. It's always one. And we decided to split them, and to compare their responses. And after you have like this problematic part with the images, which are treated exactly like as in a fashion magazine. How to ask the question, the main aspect is to question the photogeny of the show.

PON: Because it seems like again there was actually kind of from the minorities, question the notion of authorship, because you have Gary

Webb for example, by Eric Troncy and the photographs are taken by somebody else and there are only the installation shots and so really questioning the authorship. I mean it made me think of like Louise Lawler's work for example.

SM: Exactly and it's of course one of the pretexts of this system, we worked a lot on Louise Lawler's system and how to re-enact these kind of things, but of course because there are many influences coming from the artists themselves.

PON: I mean since 1987, when Le Magasin opened its doors in Grenoble as the first post-graduate training course in Europe, and there's been a constant increase in post-graduate curatorial training programmes - do you think that these programmes have had any impact or any influence on contemporary curating?

SM: No but it's a reality. I don't know so much curators or even young curators come in from this kind of education programme.

PON: I mean do you think we need them?

SM: No.

PON: No?

SM: No. No I think that we need some, we need more intellectuals, we need people who really want to think and to think deeply about the global language of the exhibition, and we don't need it, I think that we don't need so much because there are enough good managers and so forth. It's exactly the same as goes with the artist. Do you know a lot of good artists coming from the articles?

PON: It depends what country I suppose.

SM: Of course, because it's very practical also.

PON: But I think it's different perhaps in London, and maybe perhaps also in New York as well. I mean there are good artists coming out of there. London education system, because I think the London art scene

is very college-directed, it's been very influenced by Goldsmiths and very influenced by the Slade, whilst New York for example is kind of a different story, the colleges don't have the same kind of power shall we say within the production of, yes, contemporary art history or whatever. I think this is now changing in New York, but I don't know, maybe in France it's obviously…

SM: It's not the same in France, yeah it's not the same, because maybe also because like the educational system is extremely old-fashioned, and academic. And I am teaching, I know how desperately I try to teach, but they are so docile. And you know for example in the cinema field we have some very good filmmakers sometimes, but none of them is coming from a cinema school - none of them, never, since like forty years.

PON: If the history of curating was re-written linearly, and you were to place one of your exhibitions into this history, which one would it be?

SM: I would hesitate between two. There is 'Presumed Innocent', which changed a lot my life because I'm sued by the justice system since four years, and it was a very interesting process, this like critical process, political process. It was in '99, '99 yeah. I don't think that it's the best show I did, but it was very important, and still is. And for me it's clear the second one is 'Before The End' and they both mark the end of like a big chapter in my life, and the beginning of something else. That's why I wanted to do it, because I know that I will never… I will never think of an exhibition in the same way after this one.

PON: Why?

SM: Because I really found the possibility to expand this intellectual process and this idea of the game and walking on the rules, and it is such a pleasure, such a satisfaction, that I cannot any more accept into a show like a very classical way without this like luxury, because it was for me totally luxurious. I didn't have a big budget, not even a budget at all. There was nothing, quite nothing. And for me it's the most luxurious show situation. And we

worked together with two different generations, not only Olivier Mosset but also different generations in terms of like the artists and writers, and it was a fantastic and it was totally amazing not to be in control. I don't want to control. I want to lose the control.

PON: But you want the responsibility?

SM: But I want the responsibility, yes. Yes.

PON: Okay thank you.

END OF TAPE

LYNDA MORRIS

Norwich, 24-02-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator or is this a term that you're comfortable with?

LYNDA MORRIS: No I'm not comfortable with curating, I suppose I'm old enough not to be worried about sexism and I see myself as a kind of artist-curator, an artist housekeeper. I'm really keen on not getting off on being a curator and I suppose that's where being constantly not within an art school has felt ok as a way of keeping one's feet on the ground.

PON: Are you saying that there's a key difference between being a curator and coming from the position of an artist, than a curator who perhaps has developed a practice around exhibition making?

LM: I think there's a great difference between curators who come out of an art school background and curators who come out of a university background. I think it's to do with class, it's to do with practicality and maybe it's also a kind of humility because if you become a curator you've failed to be an artist rather than coming out of that university background with a sort of sense of being a curator and success.

PON: So you would associate the idea of or the perception of a curator as being one that relates to success?

LM: The other way around, that I see it as a thing of failure, that one's, yes the humility of that position I think is what one would work from and curating worries me in its current meaning and that sort of sense of the uber-curator and the power of the curator because often in my experience the interesting things have come out of failure rather than success, out of an analysis of what's really going on around you and not so much achievement, but can you make any kind of sense out of identifying down the structure rather than identifying up the structure? I think that's the thing I'm probably most proud of as a curator is possibly starting the 'East' exhibition and taking what was the most

downtrodden sector which is the open exhibition which was only really functioning in very regional local ways and wasn't even seen as something that most artists wanted to get associated with unless they weren't very good artists and how could one begin to work with the group of artists in a little provincial city here in Norwich and think that structure through and make sense of it and revitalise it, and get it I think even to a kind of stage where it's possible for an open exhibition to be more intelligent than a curated exhibition.

PON: You seem to obviously support open admission whether it's the selectors or curatorial vision, how effective do you think this has been as a model?

LM: I think that the main idea of an open exhibition was the Royal Academy principle of a group of artists who would show their latest work each year and I think taking the open exhibition through the choice of selectors, giving a very distinctive role to each year of the exhibition, I think that was quite an innovative development, it's one that happened fairly gradually but I think it is actually a very robust model that could be taken up much more than it has been taken up at this moment in time, but it's been taken up and used intelligently out of necessity rather than out of choice.

PON: You mentioned the idea of the uber-curator as a recent development; do you think there are dominant forms of curatorial artists, which have developed in the last 15-20 years?

LM: I think they've developed over a longer period than that and I did deliberately set out to make a relationship as I was developing 'East' with what for me was the formative period which was my own formative period which is going back to the late 1960s and early '70s and I mean it was the third year of 'East' where Konrad Fischer agreed to come and be the selector of it in 1993 and that I think triggered a certain moment in time where there

was in a lot of artists' minds, the idea of a relationship back to that conceptual period.

PON: Do you think that the group exhibition is still the serious work of the curator?

LM: Yes but with the selectors that we've been working with for 'East', they've come largely from not being curators and that's been very deliberate. I think that everyone carries in their heads a model of contemporary practice and to give people the opportunity to put out the picture of that is, for me, more interesting than getting a curator to do what is the next stage in a career-based on that, because in a sense you're working with people where there is a lifetime picture that has grown rather than it just being one of the carriages in a long train. So the idea of turning to dealers who I think are the most knowledgeable people, I find the dealers much more interesting than the curators and I find it much more refreshing to work with dealers, with good dealers, real dealers not merchants. And the other people that we work with is artists as selectors and that is that sense of the whole of their lifetime's practice has been about a definition of what art is and that's going to be something much rarer and more refined than the tarty position that I think of as the curator's position where you're constantly jumping into bed with someone else.

PON: In one of the discussions during the conference for *Curating in the 21st Century* you suggested that: 'many dealers are the most innovative figures within the history of art and that good museum curators gathered around these dealers'. Do you think this has changed?

LM: No, well it has changed obviously because it's a much more conscious pattern, people know, people aren't talking about it a lot but we all know that's the way any curator works - they talk about working with artists but you'll find that if you do your

analysis of who shows with who and where, that there are some key dealers around at any particular moment in time and the good curators are aligning themselves with those dealers.

PON: What past curatorial model exhibitions, historical precedents or precursors have been an influence on your practice?

LM: Well obviously now I've talked a lot about Konrad Fischer and that was quite crucial to me and working for Nigel Greenwood in London at that time one was very conscious of what his real role was in the late '60s and early '70s and I think that our whole notion of contemporary art really came out of essentially the model that he put in place. But I got very despondent about contemporary art in the middle '70s. I'm interested in the way in which Conceptualism in this country was different to Conceptualism in the States and Conceptualism in the States related much more closely to Minimalism and there was a continuous development but we did take on board quite a lot to do with minimal sculpture here in Europe but in a philosophic sense dealing with Donald Judd's dictum and Sol LeWitt's sentences on Conceptual art, it was a way of putting it into the political and philosophic discourses around European Conceptualism but minimal painting didn't really get shown in Europe and was still seen as a continuation through Frank Stella into the mainstream of post-war American art which at that point at the height of the Vietnam War we just didn't want to know about. But round about 1973, the 'Prospect' exhibition became a 'Prospect' painting exhibition and they were showing painters' painting and suddenly it seemed a very retrogressive position, the new artists that were being brought forward were people like Alan Charlton who I liked very much and everything, but it seemed to be retrogressive position after one had been thinking about Art & Language and Victor Burgin and John Stezaker and also Beuys, even Richter seemed much more political than what one was concerned about. So I got really quite disillusioned and I was much more interested by this time in the politics of it all, Marcel Broodthaers was living in London and his ideas about the museum, I

was quite close to him and spent quite a lot of time talking with him and Benjamin was still in Europe. So you know, one was retaining some of the sort of friends structure for Conceptualism but I started to work on Marxism and its influence on British art and so I went back and did the 'Artists International Association' show, the AIA, at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford in 1982, and it toured around, it went to Camden Arts Centre but it had looked at Marxist activity amongst British artists from 1933 to 1953 and of course it was a failure all of that, but I was still interested that there had been that political tradition in my country and I had a sense of identity which if I'd been alive then I hope I would have been working with them and also family traditions of uncles who tore their trousers in Cable Street and things like that, I came from that kind of radical background, my grandmother was in Val Hallington's Unemployed Workers Movement so I'd grown up with all those kind of family stories and so my interest in Conceptualism had been political and so it was quite natural when I became disillusioned with it to go back to that historical position. And so the idea of artists self-help organisation, relations with Europe and America, all the arguments around the artists refugee committee, they all seemed sort of very contemporary and very relevant those issues and it took me to a strange position which was looking a lot at figurative painting and it was the days when Andrew Brighton and Peter Fuller were seen as kind of radical figures anyhow before the kind of neo-conservatism took over. And so one started to, I worked with Andrew Brighton, this was after being in Conceptualism and looking at Konrad Fischer, worked with Andrew Brighton on 'Towards Another Picture', where I took Andrew's thesis, we'd been students together at the Royal College and I was working up in Nottingham at the Midland Group and I wanted to do a show that I thought would connect with local people's experience rather than importing something from Düsseldorf that was neither here nor there. I did bring Richter's *48 Portraits* over from Düsseldorf in the 1970s. I was at the Midland Group '76 to '79 so this was all in this period and Terry Atkinson had moved out of Art & Language and was doing

his First World War pictures with Robert Seltz Gallery at the same time as Victor Burgin's 'Peter Lee' project, the Ashington Group miners from Northumberland and then worked with Kitaj. I worked on an open photography show and I started to get interested in that side of things, but with Andrew we did 'Towards Another Picture', which was looking at popular painting in reproduction so David Shepherd, we went and interviewed David Shepherd and Terence Kinaye, the Royal Academy kind of upper class idea of realism and painting and then we looked at the Stuyvesant collection at the Tate gallery at that time and that sense of modernism. So the exhibition was organised in terms of subject matter so we had a women's section, we had a war section, we also had a still-life section and we had things like Kitaj's Spanish civil war painting next to Dame Laura Knight's Nuremburg war crimes picture next to Terence's bullets whizzing. Gustav Metzger did a newspaper piece in the women's section which was hanging next to Sir William Cole's nudes, so Gustav did page 3 of *The Sun* and *The Mirror* and at the same time we put together a book which was before *Chip* or anything like that, which was just artists' writing and it started with Sir Winston Churchill and ended with Francis Bacon, just of text, of artists' writing. And then I did Peter Fuller's 'Rocks and Flesh' when I was first here, which is the first time he'd been asked really to curate a show and so it was only really, and I stayed within that kind of figurative painting throughout the '80s as a rejection of this modernism and it was only really with starting the 'East' exhibition that I started to look again at my relationship to internal modernism.

PON: In *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls a certain kind of historical 'amnesia' towards historical innovative exhibitionary display of works of the past. Do you think that this amnesia has affected the way we perhaps perceive contemporary art curating?

LM: Yes I'm the same generation as Nick Serota, I grew up with him and on my first trip to Germany, he was on the same plane, so he

does have an awareness of the very different way in which I've worked over the years and it is quite a kind of respectful relationship. Certainly Richard Cork and Nick worked together after 'Towards Another Picture' to try and do something similar at the Whitechapel: 'Art for The People' or something like that, which we felt sort of missed the kind of richness of what we'd really tried to do and they took over quite a lot of the working men artists, inverted commas, that we had in that exhibition. I'm really interested in failure and in the richness of it all and that in a way we all know about success so it's really boring [laughs]. I've spent a lot of time and I suppose found my way back to modernism through the sense of the émigrés into Britain which were particularly strong here in this region, the University of East Anglia, I mean obviously everyone knows Max Sable now, but there was quite a rich culture here in Norwich when I first came here in the 1980s of émigrés in this region and I was invited as a result of the 'AIA' show to East Germany and I went and spent quite a bit of time in East Germany and found that really interesting and the whole sense of an untold history which was to do with émigrés who came to Britain in the 1930s because of the socialist background as opposed to defining themselves as Jewish, and the way in which the majority of them had gone back to East Germany. There was particularly a whole group of sculptors who connected with contemporary practice and so that sense of some of the things I was talking about in there, of the extreme of Germany prior to the wall coming down, and that extreme kind of tension that seemed to me to be one of the areas of failure that was deliberately being ignored but was of immense importance in terms of how people were behaving in the same way that we ignored Ireland in this country and all that kind of interested me enormously. With Declan McGonagle and he was really important. I felt a kind of closeness to Declan, we didn't really know each other very well but he picked up on quite a lot of the programme I was doing when I was at the Midland Group in Nottingham so we were showing people like Stephen McKenna and Terry Atkinson was very important to him, not that he was necessarily picking up on what I

was doing, but we were looking at a kind of alternative model of contemporary practice out of our own political dissatisfaction with the dominant picture in this country.

PON: One of the reasons I asked you about this question of 'amnesia' is that even just looking through your programmes since 1994 and some of the projects that you've curated here is that there seems to be an interest in addressing a forgotten past for example Bikvanderpol's restaging of Konrad Fischer's gallery here at Norwich or the current Gerry Schumm video show, which is a re-siting of a historical moment and there seems to be a play within many of the shows that you've done, probably even more recently as well, in trying to re-site or re-situate contemporary practice in relation to these paradigmatic moments?

LM: I don't know how much that's intellectualised as opposed to being related to my experience of having been active in contemporary art consistently. And also this thing that I started out by saying about being an artist housekeeper as opposed to a curator, a lot of that is quite instinctive like who do you want to invite to your house, who don't you want to invite to your house, I think I probably had quite a domestic model in that sense of what I'm doing and some things obviously you were close to and so you feel very strongly. I mean I think the most conscious I came to was the Terry Atkinson retrospective and I feel that Terry is quite an important figure, a very important figure and people were very dismissive of him at a certain point in time and it was that idea that the Tate or the Hayward or the Whitechapel would just never do a proper show with him and so the idea of using a tiny little gallery here and putting together an 8 piece retrospective, 8 pieces of work and contextualising those, doing his personal biographic reasons for doing a particular piece, what theoretical ideas he was dealing with at that moment in time and what was important in the history going on which was symbolised just by the photographs in the publication, and then the art historical bit of it as a way of going over a lot of the history

of the last 30 years. I think the art school feels quite critical that I look back so often and so much and I think it's also frustrating for people working with me in the gallery, they'd like to see a much more contemporary kind of programme. What I'm interested in at the moment is for example: there was talk here in Norwich about getting a new big gallery and it doesn't seem to be happening and I knew I wouldn't be part of it and I wasn't really interested in architects, I can see the green plastic door handles from here kind of thing, but it doesn't seem to be happening but I was trying to think what I could do constructively to help that new project, which I wasn't really behind and what did I care about it, and so I started to think about the artists in the region and what they really needed and the way in which they felt very excluded up in Liverpool from Baltic and obviously the new Tate doesn't have a great input into contemporary art. So I thought about the different groups of artists that there are in a region like this and the whole idea of starting an artist-led space because I was very conscious that I wasn't going down that artist-led space here, and it was something that was very much needed in this region and so I started to think about this idea of umbrellas over a number of different artistic practices, and rather than trying to curate them all as off shoots, and a lot of galleries are thinking about those kind of off shoots, that it actually would be much more interesting to work with the people in the city who have done projects recently that seemed good and pull them together and help them get the money, use my education grants to seed fund them and just let them develop and that maybe there could be quite different kinds of galleries. I've got one up and running, the Outpost Gallery now in Norwich where Sarah Staton's showing next so it's quite ambitious in terms of having a national programme not just a regional one. And now I'm working with the older kind of easel painters in the city to help them get a kind of approach room above a pub going in the city now and that seems to be a much more healthy development and I feel very critical of the lottery funding, I'm against gambling just absolutely on any level and the distortions that lottery funding have created in

this country and particularly the way in which the lottery, it was decided to target it all on capital projects rather than revenue which would actually go through to artists and helping artists and you only have to look at the fact that Peter Polumbo was the chair of the Arts Council, he's the biggest property developer in this country and the impact of lottery funding on his portfolio as opposed to the art world, to begin to see some of really what's been going on in this country and I'm no part of that. I don't want the terrific escalation in property prices that's happened in this country, far outside exceeding anything happening elsewhere in Europe and the use of the art world, they fetishise the idea of the collector but the only way in which people can be collectors is through property. So you've packed the committee at the Tate gallery, the trustees of the Tate which used to be really good artists, top flight artists and the real scholars of art but now it's collectors, property developers and then you have Polumbo for those three years in the Arts Council deciding how the lottery funding was going to be spent and we're just pawns in that game.

PON: I just want to come back to this idea of yourself as a housekeeper, you've mentioned it a number of times. It seems obvious from the outside that Norwich City Gallery has encouraged curatorial collaborations and it has also encouraged the idea that the programme is predominantly curated or organised or selected by people outside the institution. How much of a conscious strategy was this?

LM: Norwich is two hours from London and there aren't other big cities nearby. If you're working in Nottingham you can go to Sheffield, Manchester, Derby, you can move around and the outskirts of London is another area but the sense of isolation here and at the same time the loss of funding within art schools means that there's less visitors, people coming through. So one of my major justifications for an art school gallery is that we bring 50 professional practitioners minimum through a year, the kind of access to those if students want to take it up means that

in the three years of a degree course there's 150 people which sounds, if they were in that Midlands group or the Northern group or London or Scotland they would have a similar kind of level of access to information so that's how I look at it. Or am I a lazy curator, don't like to make choices myself?

PON: It's obviously something that's representative of your programme and something that's kind of acknowledged widely not only with 'East' but also the number of curators, artists, dealers etc. that you've collaborated with on curatorial projects, whether we're talking historical or predominantly contemporary and this seems like a very conscious decision rather than a lazy one?

LM: But I have felt that a sense of criticism of, that's why I joked about the lazy, that I'm seen as not putting forward what I think, what I believe in, and that it would have been much better for me career wise to have gone down that route but I should think this is a more genuine way of working. I have a sense of the gallery as being a very privileged place, both in the city and in the education institution and that the gallery is a way in which dreams can come true because you've got a gallery you can associate with all sorts of people that in the normal course and run of events you wouldn't be able to associate with and that's a nice way to live your life.

PON: In your essay for *Curating in the 21st Century* you said: 'the big public collections consider that they have a loyalty to the dealer galleries who depend on their purchases and they would argue that dealer galleries support artists and support their careers over a number of years'. How do you think this affects the kind of art that we end up seeing?

LM: Dealers are involved in the limitation of the number of artists that they represent you know, they physically can't represent more than 50 artists or whatever, that's an awful lot, you simply can't take more people on, they are dependent on

limiting and that sense of the limitation of the number of people suits the museums, they use the dealer gallery almost as a kind of protection. I think that pulled away from what I was saying in that paper because I felt if only I could sell more to museums at that time, I was very conscious that 'East' was performing a very useful function for dealer galleries and collectors and that the Hales gallery was through the door snapping up, Cabinet was through the door snapping and in the last couple of years it's been Saatchi himself and White Cube. I felt that it was very wrong that sort of within twelve months of stopping showing at 'East' it was being bought by the Arts Council collection or the Tate gallery without any come back to us either in terms of obvious credit or in terms of money. I was a bit concerned about that at that moment in time because it seemed one of the ways in which I could show to my funders and to the school the importance of the gallery here. But I think I've marginally got over that one because I was complaining about the way in which I was feeling very ripped off by the system, and then I realised that what they are trying to do is to enable more artists and to develop careers, have a vibrant art scene, who actually makes the purchase and does it all doesn't really matter, it's the way in which the public sector, it does support the private sector and to just get on with doing more of it rather than worrying about getting the credit for doing it. I know what I'm doing because for example the first time Tomoko Takahashi ever did a proper rubbish piece she wanted to do something completely different and so I spent time with her on 'East' developing that kind of way of working and now it's her standard practice. Toby Ziegler and developing his work for the 'East' exhibition and he's at Chisenhale now, I just look at it the whole time, it's very nice, it's very rewarding, perhaps one's done so much but that's where this kind of documentation of what we've done and in the 'East' catalogues the way in which I have the archive sections at the back of an 'East' catalogue. This is Tomoko's piece using all the debris from the students from the degree show, is very important because that's the way in which I claim what we've done but in fact we're being paid indirectly by

the government to help artists and to help the dealers in the art business. I don't really feel that dislike of dealers on any level; it's just occasionally trying to understand how the businesses work here.

PON: Do I sense a sense of dislike for curators per se?

LM: Yes, I don't get on I think with other, I don't have a lot of respect for curators, I'm quite interested in Catherine David, I was very full of praise for what she was doing with the Arab programme at the Witte de With that's just come to an end now and I went all the way down to Bristol to hear her talk and I don't have a lot of time for theory, for that kind of end of debate. I mean I'm very interested in ideas and intellectually in my own way but that kind of curatorial theoretical kind of position I haven't seen a lot that's really excited me over the years and what I've seen is people kind of, like Szeemann who are just puffing themselves up for stuff that they haven't really done but the system has come to claim them. And also the way in which museum curators, I think are continuing a kind of practice through to the present day, which is really about America and American culture in a way that I see all my eccentric little bits around the outside as keeping alive that sense of other traditions, the longer European tradition and I think that it was a fact that all the great art of the period from 1945 to maybe 1965 was all in America, the great collectors, the great galleries, the great critics, no one could hold a candle to Greenberg because he was writing about what he knew best which was his local scene and the Museum of Modern Art and that model of the museum of modern art. So the whole establishment level of museum curation in this country is completely indebted to that, not just this country but throughout Europe, is completely indebted to those standards set by America.

People like Greenberg and Rosenberg and all the good critics over here like Buchloh and that have all had to go to the States to

become part of it. Copelands was an English critic, Lawrence Alloway, John Russell, and they've all gone over there because there's no way in which we over here are working in anything but a kind of local eccentric way. I can't expect really if Serota wanted to do a Conceptual art show at the Tate to look at the kind of models I've been putting together on £5,000 and how to do a documentary show you know, it's quite amateur what I'm actually capable of doing however interesting he might find it, he's automatically going to go to Los Angeles County or MOMA in New York to set the standard and he's going to bring in an American curator to do it. But there's differences, political, profound geographic and political differences and as soon as you take the notion of international not meaning American artists over here but meaning a group of artists from different countries as happened round about 1967/1968, you need another art history. I don't see the museums beginning to look genuinely at what that other art history ought to be which would have, not going down the route of Patrick Heron's accusations about America but looking genuinely for that cultural change that took place round about 1967/68 which enabled the small group of German galleries to become immensely important and to shift. But now with the historisation of that period 30/40 years later it's the American picture that's emerging not this European picture. So the thing I'm interested in at the moment is how can we question our establishment to begin to look at the quite amateur low-key models that are around and find a way of building a more genuine history of that period.

PON: Seth Siegelaub suggests that the first phase of interest in Conceptual art practice from the late 1960s, early '70s came from a new generation of artists in the nineties, but now we are at a second post-critical stage when certain versions of those histories are being written and anthologies are being compiled, academicised and the museum shows are happening everywhere. There is a distance now between the past and the history that is being written through these shows and publications.

LM: That's what I feel. Seth's great isn't he, I did a conference here with Terry Atkinson and Seth Siegelaub for the opening of Terry's exhibition, but the most interesting part of it was going to talk with Seth at that time because I knew him in the 70s obviously in London and I was very interested in why he'd given up because I was also going through a crisis, having also been on the fringes of that idealistic phase and I mean he stuck with the Marxism didn't he, it was political, but he also became a textile historian and he talked to me quite eloquently about the way in which he found textiles more interesting as a cultural phenomena than art, much older, much longer standing, that Marxism itself is based on the study of textile history in Manchester and so on, that it's also women's history, it's also the development of countries into industrialisation and that our very sense of the machine is the sewing machine, that it's just so fundamental to human activity and human organisation and I found that quite, but then I've watched him since that period in the mid 90s when I went back to talk to him for the first time in about 20 years, watched him get back into the art world. I got very interested in a German Marxist historian called Frederick Antal and he looked at why things didn't progress, that we'd go through long periods, he looked particularly at why Giotto had happened when he did in Florence but then there was a kind of 100/150 year gap before the Renaissance and why had there been that huge gap and that's been quite a kind of motto to me. So I think I got back into looking around at Conceptualism and wondering about its contemporary importance in the mid-90s because it was only then that it began to look like it could be progressive again but I don't think I feel that anymore and I'm wondering where I'm going and where I can go with 'East' after Gustav which was, you can understand why one asked Gustav to select in 'East'.

PON: It also could be perceived as a self-critique as Gustav's idea is proposing an objectless exhibition, he appears to be uncurating or over-curating 'East' in opposition to the form that it has taken on over a number of years.

LM: I think there has been that relationship between one 'East' and the choice of the next selector and I suppose each 'East' exhibition gives me an indication of where I would go with the next one but 'East' is now being seen as quite valuable property and everybody wants in on the act and I don't know how much longer I'll be able to keep their hands off it sort of thing because the Arts Council in this region wants to build a kind of festival and they want to call it 'Feast' and I was just at a committee meeting saying well 'East' was chosen very deliberately, the Berlin wall had just come down, as a sense of Eastern Europe, the sense of the Middle East as being perhaps in the crisis and that I think will be the exciting part of Gustav's show, the extent to which the time and energy I've put into getting applications out in Israel and Palestine, Lebanon, around those areas and whether we do bring the artists in and I think the real model of Gustav's show is the news agency, that's what I've got in mind, like the bank of television sets rather than the projection and that's what I'm kind of seeing about it. This idea of 'Feast' and happening every two years they want 'East' to stop being annual and make it biannual but I've always related it to the art school circle and the annual cycle and I think artists need it and that's important but they've also appointed to run 'Feast' to people who they can only really give them budgets by taking money away from me and they start having meetings and they're looking at do we need the logo on coffee cups and I just know it's getting near the end of its run.

PON: If we could return to the general issues of contemporary curatorial practice, how you would perceive the changes within curatorial practice since the late '80s particularly in terms of your experience of running one particular space and having a number of different curators, different selectors, come in and if you could identify there being a shift and a change or development or regression or an alternative or a different notion of what a curator ultimately does during that period?

LM: Well obviously there's been the whole development of the education of curators. When I was at the Royal College I was on the MPhil course although it wasn't really a taught MPhil it was research degrees and there wasn't anything like a curatorial course but Andrew Brighton came out of that course, John Tagg, Jennifer Walker, Karen Walker and myself and most of us had done some sort of curatorial activity, that was just one year of it. So the Royal College, I was external examiner at Goldsmiths for the first 4/5 years of that course with Anna Harding so that was quite interesting. I completely refused to develop a curatorial course here, I run a two year traineeship which sometimes links with an MPhil or PhD and that seemed to me much more genuine which I could cope with one person at a time and work them to death but I couldn't really cope with teaching a whole course and it wouldn't be fair on people bringing them up here so I think that's really a major issue has been the national and the regional issues in this country. The enormous expansion since the early '80s of the number of galleries and curatorial possibilities in this country I think up until the 1980s you had critics who might curate some shows and that was the route that I took, working in a dealer gallery, writing criticism, teaching a bit and then wanting to curate and develop a programme. I think the Arts Council's had a much more powerful impact than anything we've really talked about, we've talked about dealers, curators, the great figures, but I think the Arts Council funding and development have been important in sort of sustaining some sort of gallery infrastructure outside of London. 'Glory of the Garden' was very kind of wonky and everything but it did have a sense that there was a duty towards contemporary art of major museums. When I first came here we didn't get any Arts Council funding at all and it was quite a long uphill battle to say that look art schools are good places outside of London to run galleries but now there's tremendous development of these grants for the arts, not grants for artists but grants for the arts, and the fact that you could turn round tomorrow and curate a show and you'd probably almost absolutely certainly get your £5,000 and there's a kind of

encouragement there to say why don't you do that not in London but somewhere, the Eastern region or the Northern region where you would be much more likely if you've got the contacts to get the money together to do it and then the possibility of the artist-led spaces, sort of getting 200 members together fairly quickly who have all got some sort of claim to being an artist and therefore justifying the £30,000 grant which is enough to run a small space, not pay anyone but run a small space for a 12 month period in a city like this. So I think the Arts Council has always encouraged the kind of normal practice in a kind of, a general practitioner and I think that's what we need, curators is that sort of sense of the general practitioner, not everybody wanting to be the big hospital specialist.

PON: Do you think that we are more able or should we be able to evaluate what good and bad curating is?

LM: We haven't begun to separate out the sort of one off freelance curator from the programme curation and I suppose one is evaluated as someone running a programme by what happens to your grant and the three year funding agreements that we're all now tied to and that's quite rightly a great sort of sense of insecurity about those, that one, three years you might be on the up and the next three years you might be on the down so there is that money led evaluation. I think there is a problem, I think people want to be curators for all the wrong reasons and it's a big power trip, I find all that really very difficult.

PON: You're obviously talking about a particular type of curator, would I be right in saying that?

LM: Yes there are places like the Castle Museum here and the curators there but they're not really involved or engaged in contemporary art. I think, I assume that, or I have assumed rightly or wrongly that what one's talking about is the people dealing with contemporary art practice and finding forms and ways

of curating that and if they are working in a historical way it's still in a relationship to that contemporary art practice.

PON: Are you also talking about a particular type of curator who is mobile and is interested in circulating within the international, biennial or curatorially led art market?

LM: Well again there's an enormous variety isn't there right the way across. My favourite story is about Sandy Nairne's brother, Andrew Nairne isn't it, I was on the Paul Hamlyn awards and someone's work came up, a Glasgow painter and I'd been to his studio the week before and I was putting together 'Pictures' at the time and I hadn't wanted to pursue his work any further and so as I didn't really know him but I had been to the studio and I thought they looked better in, the possibility of them was much better than what was actually there and what they were about so I did say something not very helpful about having been at his studio the week before and Andrew said: 'Oh Lynda you're so charming, isn't that nice, still having time to go to an artist's studio' and so I said to him just you know straight like that, well 'how do you find artists then' and he said 'in all the normal ways, through the magazines and the dealers'. Now whether he was playing to my, but there was an awful stony silence in the room after this exchange which suggested it was quite a straight forward exchange and what I'm interested in is encouraging that sense of the curator being much more closely involved with the artists and I'm terribly worried at the moment because whether it's just to do with this art school or it's something that's taking place nationally is that when I go and walk round the fine art studios at the moment everybody's painting. Well I'm finding it quite difficult to reconcile that with this kind of period I had in the 1980s when I was working with Andrew Brighton and Peter Fuller and also involved with that whole English painting post-Bomberg, and so on and also the sense that I keep putting out about the local and the amateur, actually within the last 20/30 years, that local and amateur has always had the potential if it's

been used intelligently to be quite international and where this group of ideas all interrelate.

END OF TAPE


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ROBERT NICKAS

New York, 28-03-05

PAUL O'NEILL: Let's start at the beginning, how did you become a curator? Can you tell me about your first curatorial project?

ROBERT NICKAS: It happened entirely by accident, and that was in 1984. I was walking on Lafayette Street with someone and there was this funny gallery called Gallery 345 - it was 345 Lafayette Street - and it was the gallery that was run as part of the War Resisters League. In fact it was called Gallery 345: Art for Social Change. And this woman who was running it, we got into a conversation and I think it was only a few weeks later that I was there and I had the space and I could put on a show. And I put on two shows there, which the people from upstairs, the officers of the War Resisters League, didn't understand why. They'd shown political art and posters. And I did a show that was, it was at the time of appropriation so I did a show that had links to Elaine Sturtevant and Louise Lawler, and that wasn't the first, that was the second show, so I'm getting ahead of myself.

PON: What year was this?

RN: '84, it was also the beginning of the Elaine Sturtevant showing for the first time since. Do you know about her work? I mean she's really the artist who really precedes Sherrie Levine and Richard Prince and so on. The first show was all about language, and it was called 'Hunger For Words', and all works with language, Barbara Kruger, Jenny Holzer and some others. The first show was sort of political, and anyway that didn't last very long. Obviously I didn't sell anything. In fact, in the second show there was a painting by Phillip Taffe and I couldn't convince anyone to buy it. I think I realised early on that I'm not really a salesman, I'm not very good at selling, and I'd rather show work. Actually we had a funny moment during one of the meetings for the 'Greater New York Show', there were a number of MOMA curators there, and Glenn Lowry the Director of MOMA was there, and I had really bad flu, I mean I couldn't really get out of bed, but I didn't want to miss an important meeting with some of the artists that were going to be, supposed to be in the show, and you know I had to really advocate for the artists that I was in favour of. So I really dragged myself to this meeting, and at one point someone's work was projected up on a screen, and I was really so opposed to it being included in the show, but I somehow was able to stand up, because I thought if I were to be much

more forceful, I stood up in front of you know everyone, Glenn Lowry and everyone, and the other curators and so on, and I said 'when I look at a work of art I want to, I have to want to show it, I have to want to write about it, or buy it. And I said this work doesn't meet any of my criteria', and I sat down. And someone later said no curator at MOMA would stand up in front of Glenn Lowry and say I want to write about, or I want to show it, or I want to buy it. And they said that was right to the point.

PON: So is that criteria for curatorial selection or is that your criteria for your interest in a particular piece of art?

RN: I mean I don't know how you can be interested in a work of art and not want to write about it or not want to show it. And I think that you know, that people have said it's true that the way I come to understand a work of art is to actually almost have it in my house, to show it, to… It's really through exhibitions that I understand works of art. Because also you're kind of moving in the space between one work and another, you're putting artists together in a way to make connections. I mean you know I really said in a sense what I do is really selfish, because I guess I think even if, you know, let's say you work on a show that a hundred thousand people see, or fifty thousand people see, or twenty… It doesn't matter to me how many people see it, but I think that it's like anything that you do that's… If you think about people who are making music, or writing, or whatever they're doing, making drawing etc. Everything that you do is basically - and this goes back to Mark E. Smith - what you're doing is really for yourself and maybe five people you know, and anybody else who gets something from it, I mean it's a bonus. I never really have a sense of audience for anything that I do. Well, or I do but it's really just, I mean if I write something about an artist who is living, I try to read it as if they're reading it and wondering what, you know because, I mean I've written it for them.

PON: So you see it as, some way as a two-way conversation between yourself and the artist or?

RN: No I'm just saying that this writing is for them, it's not for… Some artists will say that you're always writing for your editor. I'm not. You know I'm writing for myself and I'm writing for that artist.

But I do think it is selfish. I mean sometimes I'll, well I don't know if any, you'll have to tell me if anyone you've interviewed before has said anything even remotely like this. A lot of shows have come to me have come from a joke, it's just something I say or someone says and, you know, and if you think about it, you know to get someone to put in, I don't know, a lot of money for a show and spend a lot of money to make a catalogue, what it's really coming from is a little bit shocking. It's also sometimes it's just a play on words that becomes a title or, you know, I mean I keep notebooks or I hand write all my ideas and plans and so on. I have probably kept all of my notebooks for, you know, easily a dozen years, and sometimes it'll just be late at night and I'll pull out a notebook from four or five years ago and I'll flip through it and I'll see things that I'll say you know good Lord, thankfully I never did that that show, you know and then, but I'll see something and I'll think, oh that would be good now you know because… And I'm also not working in terms of like timing - oh this is what's going on in the art world now so I'm going to respond to that. What's funny is you sometimes stumble into responding to something going on because you have taken an idea from four or five years ago that you never got around to…

PON: But do you look at the practice of other curators in terms of the vocabulary of their exhibitions?

RN: No.

PON: So you don't have, or you're not particularly interested in what other curators are doing per se?

RN: Well I'm interested, but you can be interested in a show because of the contents of the show, not because of who did it. I don't know how to explain it, I've been going to see shows all the time, but it depends on what the show is, it's not the curator. I mean that doesn't interest me. The show interests me but the curator doesn't interest me.

PON: But do you think of an exhibition as a kind of narrative? And if so, is that narrative not somehow narrated by a particular author? I mean is there not a certain level of representation, subject representation inherent in any exhibition?

RN: I don't think of it as a narrative. You know there are shows that are for example, it could be a historical show, and so you're going to let's say, someone who's, you know I'm not an art historian, someone who's an art historian is going to do a very broad reaching exhibition of Constructivists, and that I understand and I'd like to want to go and see and study it. You have curators who specialise in one-person shows, and I have a very low opinion of curators whose careers are based on pitching their wagons to a famous artist. And there are some curators who only are interested in very well known artists, and so how could I possibly be interested in a curator who's going to organise a Cindy Sherman retrospective or a Gerhard Richter exhibition. I can go and see those shows because I am interested in those artists, but I don't have a very high opinion of the people who organise them. I probably will buy the catalogue and not even read the essay. Yes I would read the interview with the artist. Anyway I prefer interviews to essays. But you know, there are curators who, I don't think they could put together a group show to save their life, or even know how to hang it. But you know they'll, I don't want to get myself into too much trouble but they will basically use art and the artists to kind of ascend to some sort of position of being very well known.

PON: That's what I call catalogue-curating, people that flick through catalogues and magazines and make their selection based on secondary information.

RN: I mean there are curators who don't even go to studios. They barely go to studios. There are curators, they'll be in a museum when a show's being installed, and they'll see artists around and they'll say what are they doing here. You know they don't want them around. I want to be around art, I want to be around artists, and you know it really defines what I've done. I think also you mentioned that artists had spoken of me. I'd be very surprised if other curators had, because I think I'm much more of an artists' curator, and I think that artists trust me and like to work with me, probably because they see that what I do is kind of closer to what I, I put the show together the way they, artists put shows together. And you know there isn't a narrative, but I really do consider everything in an exhibition. I mean right to designing the card, the ad, the catalogue and the installation. I unfortunately have in some instances had things removed from galleries -

furniture, flowers - as people are dressed in certain ways and not in others, you know more or less. I think that that's also something you have with certain curators, it is a little bit controlling, they're really directing the whole, the whole show. And the show isn't just a show. I mean I've redesigned some spaces for shows, again asking people to put in a lot of money for something that's going to be just torn down five or six weeks later. I think it's all considered.

PON: Have you primarily curated group exhibitions?

RN: Yes. I have recently though done an exhibition where I paired a little known photographer, William Gedney - he's a photographer who came up the same time as Diane Arbus and Larry Clark. He was a New York photographer. He only worked in black and white, and I did a show. His work is not exhibited frequently. There was only one large exhibition at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and there was a great book, which includes some of his notebook pages. A really fascinating artist and I think deserving of more attention. And I put a group of pictures that he took on road trips that he did around the country, and I paired him with Christopher Wool, who's not so known as a photographer but has I think a great large series of pictures called *East Broadway Breakdown*. So the Christopher Wool and William Gedney exhibition was pairing two artists. I am going to do a Stephen Shore exhibition in the fall. That's one artist. It's a specific group of works also taken on the road in '72. It's called *American Surfaces* and Phaidon is very soon putting out a book of the complete *American Surfaces*, and I wrote the introduction to that book. So I will do a one or two-person show, but my preference really is a group show.

PON: I mean how would you define your particular practice as a curator?

RN: Define it? When I started out I thought I could do whatever I want, and I still feel that way. One of the earliest shows that I did that got a lot of attention, I completely borrowed the title from Harald Szeemann's 'When Attitudes Become Form' and that was the big show that he did at the Kunsthalle in Bern in 1969. And in that show I had a lot of younger artists but I also included a number of artists who took part in the original exhibition - Allen Ruppersberg, Giovanni Anselmo - and I remember meeting some European curators who came from Switzerland and

they said you know in Europe this would be impossible, a young curator could never take such a famous title by such a famous curator such as Harald Szeemann. And so maybe it was a little cheeky, but you know it was also the time of appropriation, and I felt you know that I could take titles. And I did a number of shows that had… I did 'Primary Structures', which was another famous show, from 1966 at the Jewish Museum, and I did a show called 'The Art of the Real', which was a MOMA exhibition. I actually may go back to doing a few of those shows. I'm not sure. I don't know if you know, I've done shows that were organised just around the letter of the alphabet. There was one show, which was the letter C and the last names of the artists were all the letter C. There was one show I did in France and the letter was W, which is actually, that was… I mean some could say that's, you know you're sort of fooling around, but I mean I recently was contacted by a young guy in France who I think was in the curatorial programme at Le Magasin, and he asked if he could do a letter show, like would it be all right with me. And I said well of course it is, the idea is that anybody can do it, it's not just that I can do them, and you don't need my permission. And I said just, I mean you know do it and just send me some pictures. And I haven't heard back from him yet but, even taking the title of an older show, I mean you could do that as well, so they're just sort of examples in a sense of what you can do. But as I said I really did when I started out think I could do whatever I wanted, and that was… I mean as a way of being independent. And also I do like the way that you understand, that you use previous exhibitions and artists' work from say the sixties and seventies to understand now. I mean and it goes both ways as well.

PON: So you do situate certainly what you do as a curator in relation to paradigmatic exhibitions or certain models in order to make links between them?

RN: I think that's important to do. I'm working on an abstract painting show, not exactly the sexiest things that I could do right now, but that again is, I'm kind of challenging myself to do that. And in that show I want to have a lot of younger painters but I also am very interested in having some more historical figures like people from the fifties, sixties, seventies, people like Paul Feeley and Yayoi Kusama. I mean she's, in a sense she's not really, you don't even think of her

as a historical figure anymore because she's such a force, and actually gets better and better as she gets older. But, it also comes from Punk and DIY, but I'm also a little bit in favour of the underdog. Yes so doing a show with someone like William Gedney who I've such a high regard for his work and it's a bit painful that he's, you know he's not known. I mean to champion young art, new artists, and then also to kind of bring back attention to, or look back on maybe forgotten figures or not… It really always comes from the work, again kind of esteem for the work itself.

PON: Talking about this kind of forgetfulness, historical forgetfulness or things that may have been forgotten and that you're interested in the idea of kind of bringing them to the fore somehow. In Mary Anne Staniszewski's book *The Power Of Display: A History of Exhibitions at MOMA* she talks about a certain kind of historical 'amnesia' for exhibitionary display practices of the past - do you think that we suffer from this amnesia within contemporary curatorial practice?

RN: Well that's probably one of the reasons why there were those shows that were quoting shows from the sixties, and their structures like 'Art of The Real', 'When Attitudes Become Form'. I think the problem is a bit worse you know. One of my biases is, I don't necessarily, I'm not necessarily sure just how closely people really look at art, and in fact I tend to think that a lot of people in the art world are what I would call visually impaired, and that's critics, curators, collectors, dealers. Dealers of course I think, and sometimes curators, can be what I would think of as sociopaths, sort of very charming people and they're driven by it. They're driven by different things, not necessarily art usually - money, power and so on. And so in a sense my feeling that people don't really look at art, it has, it really comes to bear on exhibition design for example. I try to create ways, which slow people down. I've done shows that have a huge amount of works, very dense, and it's very satisfying to see. You'll see people go into a show and they're kind of in a hurry or they're walking around and they see everything sort of in one glance, and they go out very quickly. I did a show recently, last summer, at PS1, with Steve LaFreniere, called 'Curious Crystals of Unusual Purity', and that was a kind of giant cabinet of curiosities, and there's a real density of work and it was satisfying to see how much time people would spend in that gallery,

maybe just moving through it from all the way round, and it was very densely layered and it was very intentional that it was set up in a certain way, and I think to really move people not just from one work to another but to move people all throughout the space. Oh that title by the way, that whole show just came out of that title, which is a song title, a kind of English folk psychedelic singer who lives here now, Bridget St John. She was probably for years John Peel's favourite singer, in fact he started his record label just to put out a record by Bridget St John. And it's funny because here I was thinking wouldn't it be great if she came and sang at the opening, and is there a way of flying her from England and getting her here, and putting her up and paying her, and I asked around and it turned out that she lives in New York on Bleeker Street, and she came, she was at the opening but it was also, I have to say one thing that I do is that I think curators do that, you're seducing people, you're seducing the artist to be in the show, you're seducing someone. I mean if you have to, if you're not associated with an institution and someone has to come up with all this money to… And I knew when I heard the title 'Curious Crystals of Unusual Purity' that it was a great show, especially because there's been so much kind of like really, a lot of work in the last few years that came flooding kind of into my mind as soon as I thought of the title, and I realise that when I went to artists and said I'm going to do this show and I'd like you to be in it or make work for it and it's called 'Curious Crystals of Unusual Purity', I knew that the title was going to pull them in instantly. And it did, it pulled all of them in instantly. Titles often generate, they set every single ball rolling for me. It might also have something to do with being also a writer, so something else… Well yeah it's true, sometimes when I sit down to talk to someone and I'm on a, I want to do a show and I get kind of worked up with explaining what it's all about, and thinking what it could be and all that, you know I will make this big picture or something, and convey all of my excitement, and I'll leave the room, and the person will have said okay we're going to do it, and I have almost no memory of speaking to them. In other words you're sort of performing in a way and you're really on, and yes it's almost like the part of your brain that might remember it is being, it's like an override or something.

PON: You started curating in '84 - do you think that there's a particular dominant form of curating that has developed in the last

twenty years?

RN: I don't know.

PON: You know locally or internationally, or in terms of perceptions of what a curator does, or what the role of a curator has become, looking at contemporary art practice, has anything shifted in some way during this period?

RN: I normally avoid you know like panels or conferences or any kind of… I mean I don't really talk about it, even if you think about it a lot, and it's hard after twenty-one years, you do sort of know what you've been up to. But I think for so long it was just kind of like my own world that I was playing in, and it's true, you know I'll be walking down the street and I'll run into an artist and they'll say 'Oh where are you going?' and I'll say, 'Oh I'm just on my way over to a studio'. And they'll say, 'You've just got the best job'. And I've never, I think I've never thought of it as a job.

PON: But it certainly is a discipline, if not a job?

RN: Well, I have to say for, you know having said oh a show can come out of just a joke, or a song title, I take it very seriously, and, I mean it's what I, I think it's what I was meant to do.

PON: Do you primarily work with artworks or with artists?

RN: Both. Usually for a show there are very, very specific pieces that I need to be using and there are all these different pieces to build the show. And I have developed long, close relationships with a number of artists, and they, it's almost as if, you know if you're an artist and you're going to have a show you're going to say okay this is the space, this is the room, I'm going to do eight paintings and I'm going to have a sculpture in the centre of it. I'm not able to make all those pieces, and so I'm kind of going to people and I'm telling them what I'm doing, what I need and so on. So there are a number of artists who've been in many many shows of mine, they know, they trust me and they know that… I mean, I know that if I ask for something I'm going to get it, so I can count on it, and there's certain like building blocks for shows, and

those are only in known works, pre-existing works, or works that will be made by artists who I have already such a strong connection or working relationship with. I'm not necessarily one of those curators who likes to just ask someone to do something and then be surprised when the truck brings it to the space. I kind of need to know more or less what it looks like, and kind of state a case, because I'm really orchestrating. I mean you wouldn't move into a new house and call nine different furniture stores. Just tell one to send over the bed and this one to send over a sofa, that one to send over a television, so I'm really choosing specifically every single piece. And I don't like to leave things up to chance. I mean things will happen regardless of how much you want them to be a certain way, it's just, it's inevitable. I mean I've always said you can more or less control everything up until the moment the show opens and the first person walks in the door, and then it's just all up for grabs.

PON: How would you say your own practice has developed since '84 until now?

RN: Well, my shows are better now than they were. I mean I'm a better writer than I used to be. That's funny, when Maurizio Cattelan said when I interviewed him for the catalogue, he said when you're an artist in your life, you want to be in this kind of content improving, everything is somehow getting, going forward in some direction. I have to say one of the things that I, as a curator one of the things that I think is kind of great is you're really lucky because you can be so, in a sense you can be loyal to artists over many years, and in a sense you're also very promiscuous. Like more artists come along and you've got… You know I've never been associated with one, curating one kind of art, and I don't think that loyalty is something that's in really great, in real abundance in the art world. You know there are artists that I did work in twenty-one years and I've been working with them for almost that entire time. You don't even find, I think in terms of galleries, that kind of loyalty unless the artist keeps selling, they keep giving them shows, putting them in shows. And I've also seen, you know there are curators who, whoever the big artists are, then they want to be including them in shows and I don't really care one way or the other what an artist's position in the market is, you know, it's that I'm interested in that work, and I don't think that I'm very influenced

really by… In fact actually the more well known artists are, the more I kind of run in the opposite direction. There are some people that, you know I do like their work but they became famous and I just didn't want to be seen as, you know, using that work. So there are people that I've never included in shows. There are many artists I've never written about because, they've been written about by nine thousand other people and they've been in five hundred other shows, they've been on the cover of so many magazines. So I'm really like, I'm whatever the opposite of starstruck - I'm star-shy. And having said that, there are a lot of artists I've worked with from the beginning who really became very well known, and I continued to work with them after. I guess in a sense I'm known a bit for seeing artists early on. I think that's just from going to studios and actually it's from, like you're making some kind of great discoveries all by yourself. Mostly it's artists who are telling me about other artists.

PON: You mentioned, you said that you feel like your practices, and the exhibitions that you now curate are certainly better than those you were curating before and that you've improved as a curator, and that would suggest that there is a notion of what good, that you may have a notion of what good and bad curating is. What do you think that is, how would you define a good curated art exhibition?

RN: Let's start with the bad ones! A bad one could be a theme. I like theme shows, but a theme where all the works are just there as illustrations, they merely illustrate the theme, and it's obvious, and there are no surprises. Sometimes it's where you see that they're good artists and that the work that is chosen is not particularly a good example of their work. A badly installed show is a real crime. And actually sometimes I will, you know I can walk through a show and think well okay you know let's have this there, that somewhere else. But you know you can kind of rearrange it. I think a lot of people do that but you can take a show that's not particularly good, and move some things around and make it look a lot better. It's the same show, it's the same work. So I think that's a little bit of a… I don't know if that's a talent.

PON: I think it's a learned talent though, in doing it over and over and over and over again somehow.

RN: I think you have to have a real feeling for space, and how to articulate space, and some people just don't have it. There are some people that are very good with certain things, like someone could be very good in selling video works, and not be able to install a painting you know. All they know that it goes from the centre of the wall, and then of course oh it's too high, they just… People have their strengths you know.

PON: So a good show?

RN: A good show? A good show avoids everything I just mentioned!

PON: That's too easy!

RN: No. I mean I've just worked on the… Okay, I think I know, I've just worked on the 'Greater New York Show', and there were six curators. I've mentioned earlier Glenn Lowry, the Director of MOMA, Alanna Heiss, Director of PS1, Klaus Biesenbach, Ann Temkin, curator from MOMA, PS1 curator Amy Smith-Stuart, and myself. And I worked on the 'Lyon Biennial' with Le Consortium two years ago. I don't like big shows. I don't think big shows work. I think this show looks pretty good, I think it's because there's a lot of good art in it, and it's well installed, but I don't necessarily think that three, four, five, six, seven people should be curating a show. I think a good show is really coming from a vision of one person. And sometimes I think also you get into a real, if you have a real engagement with maybe one other person, and I've done some shows where there was a second curator but you know for better or worse I just think that there should just be one person behind the wheel that's driving.

PON: Why do you think that? I mean there is a certain trend that's been developed, say particularly within international biennials, which has become more and more prevalent over the last say five, six, ten years.

RN: Yeah, too many biennials, too many art fairs.

PON: And they're all, and there is a tendency now towards this idea of

the collective curatorial model if you like.

RN: Personally I don't think it really works. I mean if you want to have a lot of fights, arguments, passion and so on, I mean there are times when it is good. You know there were times working on the 'Lyon Biennial' that they were great, there were times that you know… It's hard to have been working for over twenty years and you are sort of spoiled. And to be involved in a show with other curators, and where there are going to be artists in the show and works in the show that you simply do not endorse, it's a bit painful. You know I'm not working as a curator so that I can go home at the end of the day exhausted, frustrated and angry. I'm usually having a pretty good time. I'm not doing it to be miserable.

PON: Did your experience of curating a biennial ultimately affect your thinking about curatorial practice, working within a kind of very visible situation. Biennials have a certain means of representing themselves within both a local and an international context. There is a relationship between the local and the global that the curator makes visible.

RN: The one that I worked on was the 'Lyon Biennial'. It's very much a French biennial. It's important to France, it's important for the city of Lyon. I don't think it's been really known as a biennial, it's not certainly one that's attracting a huge art world coming, getting in from all over, like Venice, where the 'Venice Biennale' or 'Documenta'. That show I think really gets broken down into one artist having a room by themselves, or maybe two artists are paired and so on. It was one of the best, it was a really well received show, I thought it looked good and had a lot of great work in it, but I'm not sure what that is as a show. Is it really like going to say sixty one-person gallery exhibitions that were all put in one giant location, I really do like to see one work up against another and another, and actually I sometimes have said you know put something next to something else that doesn't seem right, or that you wouldn't do in a million years, because there are always a lot of happy accidents. And then you know you have this happy accident and then it's another show and you stand there and say what a genius I was, to put this next to something else. I mean at PS1, one thing that I like to do, a lot of the people who installed the show, shows there,

there are a lot of younger artists, and I really talk to them, and I'm pretty clear in my mind what I want to do but I will often say what about this or what about that. And I have a feeling that curators in general don't really talk to installers and don't really ask opinions and probably don't even get to know. I didn't see that these are people who are just carrying, and just putting something up on the wall. And I have some kind of a good relationship with our teams installing a show and I need them to get the show up, but also I'm interested in how they see it.

PON: I mean how did you approach the 'Lyon Biennial'? How did you approach it as an exhibition? Because I mean obviously there's a difference between being brought into a particular city that you don't know so well and there's a history of that biennial.

RN: To be perfectly honest you know the team was Le Consortium, so it's Le Consortium in Dijon and they have a long history, although that has ended. There is Xavier Douroux very strong figure, Franck Gautherot and Eric Troncy, and they invited myself, they invited Anne Pontegnie from Brussels, and initially Jan Winkelmann, the German curator, who they later axed. I had the feeling, as I said I have a long history with them, I've done some of my most ambitious, complicated projects with them. I had a feeling that I was there to really bring in, to bring in the American artists, so I had a feeling that that was… I mean I proposed a lot of people, not just Americans, and they were very conscious of, you know I mean the relationship, between France and America since the war, were such that there couldn't be you know too many, but I have to say one of the best rooms I think in the biennial was a pairing that I made between a painter Betty Tompkins, who's a photo realist painter and she's just actually since that show been rediscovered - photo realist painter from the late sixties, early seventies, who's subject matter is always erotic, and there was a room that had a number of her paintings from the late sixties, early seventies, around three large mis-stretched paintings by Steven Parrino, an artist who passed away last January, and the Parrino paintings were titled *Death in America One*, *Death in America Two*, *Death in America Three*. It was quite a great room. And that's sort of what I look for. So the different things that… it wasn't just in the room but it was, you know it was a kind of a major showing, a major exhibition for an artist

Stephen Parrino, who really is much more highly regarded in Europe than here, and then bringing back Betty Tompkins who's an artist who had not really been showing her work for quite a long time. And as a result of being in that show, I mean she was really singled out, in for example 'Liberation' and the Pompidou Museum bought a painting of hers, and she's working again, so I mean I do like to kind of bring people back. And the 'Lyon Biennial' gave me an opportunity to do that in her case.

PON: And your current process at PS1, you've decided to use the term 'advisory curator' - is that right?

RN: Curatorial adviser.

PON: Curatorial adviser. Why that terminology?

RN: I guess I don't like the word 'curator' and 'curated by'. I think a lot of my shows say 'organised by'. But I thought 'adviser' made it seem like I was sitting a little bit outside. I have already done a lot of projects there as a curator. 'Adviser', maybe more like an accessory after the fact.

PON: You want to appear and disappear at the same time almost.

RN: Yeah.

PON: Are there any particular exhibitions that have been kind of an influence upon your practice? You mentioned 'When Attitudes Become Form'.

RN: Well you know - and I should have said it earlier - the catalogue for 'When Attitudes Become Form', which I've had for a very long time, was really very important to me. I mean that was 1969. I would have been thirteen. My interest in contemporary art goes back to being a teenager. I've read *Artforum* from the age of thirteen. It was a very interesting time because all of a sudden what you were reading about was people like Robert Smithson, so in a sense I went from being you know like a middle class kid who thought that art was an impressionist painting in a frame, to having my head completely spun around by these large works out in a desert. And you know I wouldn't have known it at

the time personally, I would understand that it was a whole post-studio practice, and you know of course those figures you know are really important to me - well really Smithson because his writings, which is an influence. And I always used to take note when I was in artists' studios for a long time, I'd say you always see a copy of *The Writings of Robert Smithson*. You know, you don't always, and I would go into an artist's studio and of course one of the things I'm doing right away is kind of snooping. I'm looking at the work but I'm also looking at the books on the shelf and I'm looking at what music they're listening to, and of course if somebody would be listening to bad music I would think that's not a good sign, or, you know I would see, oh they've got the writings of Robert Smithson, or they have Ad Reinhardt's writings, you know which were also influential for me. The 'When Attitudes Become Form' show, which I only experienced as a catalogue, probably is, for years it's the one catalogue that I just pored over and over. It's most, it's a great catalogue actually. It's mostly pictures and I did get to meet and sometimes interview and work with, fairly early on, artists who were in the show, and I got to know them, like Robert Barry, who was a really important conceptual artist, and still is a great artist now. I'm not only interested in his work from the sixties. Allen Ruppersberg, like he's a really amazing artist. Very few people realise he was in that show. You think of him as coming a little bit later. But that was probably one of the first big shows he was in.

PON: And would you have been aware of Seth Siegelaub's shows…

RN: Oh of course. And I had all those catalogues. And I had collected *Studio International* and I've always had a really good library, from the period that I'm interested in on to now. But also through artists' books, I became very interested in certain artists, like Marcel Broodthaers, who was I guess probably in the early nineties was very influential for me, you know questioning the idea of the exhibition and Gilbert and George. It's funny they seem contradictory figures, for example, you know, like my love from when I was a kid of Warhol but then also kind of real engagement with the work of On Kawara who I've done a number of exhibitions with. You know so to go from you know Andy Warhol to On Kawara to Gilbert and George, to Robert Smithson. It's like what I was saying before, the way you can be really promiscuous in art.

PON: Seth Siegelaub used the term 'demystification' to define the changed role of the curator in the late sixties, early seventies. Do you think 'demystification' is still a relevant term to locating or positioning the curator within the mediation of an exhibition?

RN: I'm not sure how to answer that.

PON: Do you think a curated exhibition can be a work of art in itself?

RN: Well, I guess if you define art as something made by an artist, how could a show be a work of art, made by a curator? Some shows are just better than others. I think that's really my answer. And I don't mean to be coy - they just are. And you know, you can tell the difference. There have been... A good example, you know, is the Hélio Oiticica show at the New Museum. I mean you know an excitable artist, and long overdue to be seen in this country. Marian Goodman had done one exhibition in her gallery. I and a lot of people went to that show and walked out. We just felt the same thing. It was completely flat. So how do you take a really amazing artist and great work and it was a very disappointing exhibition. And maybe there were also... Your disappointment is compounded by the expectation you go in with, but I thought the only thing you could do leaving that show, you buy the catalogue and you go home, and here there are all these pieces with Marilyn Monroe and Jimi Hendrix on the cover with lines of cocaine on it. All you could do, that was so depressing that show, was to go home, open the catalogue to one of those pages, put some lines of cocaine over the lines of cocaine in the reproduction and that's what I did.

PON: I mean one question I'd like to ask you is, do you think that the kind of since '87 actually when the first post-graduate training course opened at Le Magasin in Grenoble, do you think that ultimately that will have an impact on the rise and rise of the curator as a visible entity within the contemporary arts?

RN: I've never been... as I said I've never been inside any of these curatorial programmes really, and I guess I have my doubts that this is something you can teach someone to do. You know obviously you can, there are a lot of things you can teach people to do. I don't know if you can teach a person to be a good curator. And it might be something

maybe it's based a lot on my own experience, but you kind of grow into, and you know you learn along the way. It's kind of you're learning as you're doing it. But I have my doubts, and the one thing - I don't want to seem too reactionary but I do think that any school that is going to be an influence you know, and you think about people coming out of say the Whitney ISP or any programme where there's a particular, there are particular agendas or biases and so on, I do think that a good curator is not someone whose exhibition has lots of studios, well argued footnotes. So I do think that you're working with works of art and it's not like a bookish situation at all. Yeah, I have my doubts about being able to teach someone to be a curator.

PON: I mean on one level one could say that the post-graduate training courses are kind of a response to a period in the eighties when curating was becoming deprofessionalised, ultimately meaning this idea that anybody could be a curator.

RN: If you go back to that period in New York early in the mid-eighties, when so many people just invented themselves as curators, and I'm one of them. I'll tell you there are very few people from around that time who just became curators who are still around. You don't see them anymore. And some of them were absolutely criminals - they were criminals. And they saw that the art world was a really easy mark, and it was a place to make money and it was a place to get involved in the whole social whirl and so on. And I'd said let's leave it on this point, you know. As I said I'm one of the few people from that time who's still around, and who still has, I mean a reputation intact, but I always used to joke, you'll see in my book that I say that I'm the only, everyone made money in the art world in the eighties and I'm the only one who didn't. But you know there was a curator, you might have read this really great piece in *Artforum*, Christian Leigh - you know about him? Oh you don't? Christian Leigh - his last name's spelt L E I G H - he came into the art world. You've got, anyway you can find him in *Artforum*. I don't know exactly what issue it was in, but he just sort of appeared in the New York art world and he got a job as, I don't know how he got this job, he got it, he started to curate shows, he got a job as the reviews editor for *Artforum*, he parlayed being the reviews editor in *Artforum* to going around the galleries and buying works of art which were sent up town to his apartment and which he never paid

for. He would organise exhibitions, and works that weren't sold, that came directly from artists, he would have them not returned to the artist's studio, they were just returned to his house. His big finale was to piggyback onto a 'Venice Biennale' by going to the people organising the show and said if you give me a space I will bring over this show, the whole thing will be paid for. It became… You know, he, and I think that even before that happened he had somehow gotten the letterhead of the Venice 'Biennale' and he had already started sending out notes to people about it. So he, all this money was put together, he put this show on at the 'Venice Biennale', opened at the same time, and you know the show was up for whatever it is - four, five months. The show finished, and artists, galleries and collectors were not getting any of their works returned. He had spent all the money. There wasn't a dime left to bring any of the work, to send any of the works back. Some people I guess they tried to sue him for taking the work. He vanished, he disappeared, no one saw him, he just ran off. And that to me is really the ultimate story of the self-invented curator in New York in the eighties. The guy was a sociopath, and a crook, and he conned a lot of people out of money and art. You know ultimately people got their work back, some, I know one collector in Italy who had to hire his own art movers and trucks, and they went there, but I mean there was hundreds and thousands of pounds of art sitting there. And you don't want your paintings sitting in Venice, I mean it's, you know in like the mouldy, humid, salty air, being destroyed. He's never been able to show his face in the art world ever again. I think he may be in England now, I think he works as a film director. Apparently, I think that if he ever came back to the United States, I think he would be arrested.

PON: Let's leave it there, on Christopher Leigh.

END OF TAPE

HANS ULRICH OBRIST

Paris, 26-01-04

PAUL O'NEILL: In the last 15-20 years there has been an unprecedented interest in contemporary art curating. How do you think the curatorial discourse has changed during this period and what are the dominant forms of curatorial practice that have developed during this time?

HANS ULRICH OBRIST: The field has grown exponentially in the last 15 years. One of the main changes is the emergence of many new biennials, the ever increasing polyphony of centres is another major change, also a multitude of curatorial models have emerged, the last 15 years are the emergence of a very strong generation of artists who put the focus on the time protocol of exhibitions and which led to a whole new form of exhibition (the exhibition as a program), in terms of concrete practice a major change happened in the funding situation. In the early '90s curating involved a whole range of activities, Szeemann's famous list of the curator as a generalist. However fundraising did not play a big role. This is the biggest change: since the second part of the '90s fundraising has become the essential task of a curator, at least 50 percent of my work today has to do with fundraising and not the exhibitions, those which I have organised since 2000 would not have been possible without massive fundraising, so the profession has completely changed.

PON: Something very apparent in your projects is an interest in establishing exploratory spaces, laboratories without finite statement. You appear more interested in contributing to knowledge, producing something that can be used elsewhere. This can be seen with your projects: 'Interarchive', 'Laboratorium,' and even 'Utopia Station', there are so many models being used within the same framework or with the 'Interviews' project there is the same ongoing production of information for other people to use. You work with so many people over a longer period of time, where you are employing people to do a particular task. Your projects span a wide field of discourse and it seems that, as a kind of an admission, that you may not know it all, you seem to bring people with knowledge on board to assist in the research and realisation of projects. How important is this pooling of knowledge to you?

HUO: Generally speaking, I have always tried to avoid exhibitions where the exhibition illustrates a curatorial proposal, which I think

somehow is redundant and very limited. For my first curated show, 'The Kitchen Show' in '91 in St. Gallen it was about testing the kitchen as a place for an exhibition, and also following Robert Musil: 'Art can happen where we expect it least', it was not a kitchen theme show. If they are vaguely themed shows, the 'theme' of the shows has to be a trigger, in these laboratory projects, which you mention and which are all in the long term. The idea of the exhibition space as laboratory should not disappear as it enables the unexpected, the spontaneous and the unplanned. 'Cities on the Move', 'Do It', 'Laboratorium'. It is not the top down plan as we can find it in Le Corbusier and that's where curating can learn from urbanism: to question the often unquestioned master plan Yona Friedman or Constants Cedric Price or also Team X who all questioned the master plan in the CIMAM context of the 50s and tried to build in moments of self-organisation and bottom-up organisation. 'Cities on the Move', was open enough to trigger things, which evokes the memory of the visionary Polish urbanist and architect Oskar Hanson and his visionary manifestos for open form and participation, for Hanson who died earlier this year near Warsaw participation never became a cliché. For 'Cities on the Move', Hou Hanru and I tried to use the travelling show, which is usually a homogenising force streamlining shows, we tried to make the contrary and produce each time for each venue a local and global research and a learning system. It was an infinite process of emerging dialogues, of emerging collaborations, of feedback loops and notions of circularity, also of mise en abime and recycling of previous exhibition design. With 'Utopia Station', Molly Nesbitt, Rirkrit Tiravanija and I wondered how we could think again about the social contract of art. After an initial appearance at the 50th 'Venice Biennale' in 2003 the 'Station' has evolved into a kind of an evolving system. After having been very horizontal in Venice, to occupying a 'receptive' zone, which can at any moment be animated. In view of this, we decided, for the presence of 'Utopia Station' at the Haus der Kunst in Munich to develop much more of a program. The entire piece, an exhibition architecture by Rirkrit Tiravanija is a vertical tower, recycling materials from Venice which is not a 'building' but a passage to walk through, within zones for projections, light zones and dark zones, fast lanes and slow lanes. The space is actually programmed in a different way every day.

One thing these laboratory research projects have in common is that there are different, layers of involvement of the artists, some contribute a work, often a new work is triggered and others contribute structural elements for the installation or exhibition architecture. In order to understand the forces which are effective in the visual artist it is necessary to look at the other fields this process obviously not only involves artists, but architects, designers, writers. It is always a pooling of knowledge also in this regard. My conviction has always been on the contrary, you know, I really try. I think a curator should not stand in the way. This is my idea of curating, not only to ask the artist to do a piece, but to also get involved in a different, often more intense way. For example, this started with my kitchen show in 1991, where Fischli and Weiss did a kitchen altar, but they also did all the photographic documentation of the show. This is a red thread.

PON: You have said that 'routine is the enemy of the exhibition'.

HUO: It is always interesting for an artist or architect, or the museum when practitioners are asked to do something they would never be asked to do. It is Cocteau and Dhjagilev's ETONNEZ MOI. For this, pioneers such as Alexander Dorner, Willem Sandberg, also Adriano Olivetti and their experiments, have inspired me. Another red thread of the laboratory exhibitions you mention is the idea of going beyond the fear of pooling knowledge, to invite architects, scientists to these projects in the art world. The relation to these other fields is not a unilateral transfer but a regular venturing into these other fields. Particularly intense has become the contact zone with architecture and urbanism from 'Cities On the Move' to 'Mutations' or more recently *Domus* magazine with Stefano Boeri.

Concerning your initial question about the archive I see the archive not as a continent but as an archipelago. The title 'Interarchive' has a double meaning: it is an archive between cities; on the move, not belonging to a geography, then it is also about the in-betweeness, zones between other archives an archive always hides another archive, which leads us to 'Utopia Station' project - the idea of archives of exhibitions. Besides curating I developed the 'Interviews' project.

PON: As toolboxes, the exhibitions that you have done incorporate the idea of the exhibition always developing over time, 'Cities on the Move' had various manifestations, 'Utopia Station' is an ongoing project; 'Do It' is another ongoing project. How would you see your projects as toolboxes, how do you see them as possibilities for ideas being filtered through those projects into the curatorial projects of other curators?

HUO: There is something lifelike about shows like 'Do It' or 'Cities on the Move' and the way they tour is more that they have their own life cycle. The exhibition is alive. Lyn Margulis wrote: 'Metabolism has been a property of life since it began. The first cells metabolize: They used energy and material from outside to make, maintain, and remake themselves'. Scientists in the early 21st century are inventing a future based on molecular technologies, from biotechnology to nanotechnology to material science as well. As Meyer and Davis show in *It's Alive*, we live the moment when information is converging with biology: change has become more rapid, and volatility permanent, the adaptive dimension, with autonomous software and a high degree of connectivity giving rise to big, unexpected swings and non-linear effects. Then we could also talk about Mandelbrot and the butterfly effect of exhibitions, which sometimes occurs.... this is something that is very difficult to plan, but I think it has something to do with, I think exhibitions have to be generous and maybe the most important thing is not exactly known where. So that is something, which we are always trying to define so then it can also be used by other fields.

PON: The preparation and research period for large-scale exhibitions has decreased dramatically with the expansion of biennial culture and the acceleration of art's global economy. How has the issue of temporality affected your practice and research as a curator of these shows?

HUO: The homogenising forces of globalisation are also affecting the art world, one important aspect is the formatting and homogenisation of time, therefore the necessity for the coexistence of several time

zones in exhibitions enables a great variety of different contact zones. I am interested in the whole notion of the time protocol of the exhibition. I am working on a larger show for 2007 co-curated with Philippe Parreno and it will be an opera as a group show where every artist will have a different time instead of space. This is usually the case with group shows.

PON: How does your multilayered approach to exhibitions continue with 'Uncertain States of America' 2005, the show you co-curated with Gunner Kvaran and Daniel Birnbaum, at Astrup Fearnley Museum of Modern Art, Oslo?

HUO: 'Uncertain States' is part of a series of shows that reinvent the problematic format of the survey of a specific scene. We show 40 artists who emerged after 2000. Similar to the way the monographic shows work in Paris, which take the usually very rigid and predictable genre of monographic shows and try to give it a new edge, try to reinvent its spatial and temporal parameters, try to invent each time a display feature. There are many shows with a number of artists from a specific city or country and they are usually meaningless to the artists and more about representation rather than to become a performative space. Earlier Shows like 'Nuit Blanche', 'Life Live' (which I had co-curated with Laurence Bossé on the 90s scenes in the UK and also in the Northern European countries) and now 'Uncertain States of America' is the outcome of a long research period. It is the focus on a specific geography. Gunnar, Daniel and I travelled to the US eleven times on research this year, visiting Seattle, Portland, Chicago, Pittsburg, Miami, San Francisco as well as New York and other places. In Europe we are usually only familiar with NY and to a certain extent LA and the other scenes are neglected.

The show tries to show the complexity of the new scene and also of a new generation. For the first chapter we have individual presentations, almost like shows within the show, temporary autonomous spaces where the artists' singularity is the focus, the artists each have a room and show an ensemble of their work or a bigger installation. It is interesting to see that there is a strong emergence of political work, many works are about open-ended, non-linear storytelling and there is also a strong presence of non-

nostalgic ways of revisiting pop. The artist Matthew Brannon designed the catalogue and all the related printed matter. The show opened last week and we already have 6 venues where it will tour so the research can continue to go more into depth in the years to come, each show will add a new chapter.

PON: Your expansive large-scale exhibitions are often the most well known, but since the nineties you have been working on solo projects with artists as part of the 'Migrateurs' project at Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris and more recently you have been developing more long-term monographic projects with artists at the museum. Are they testing the parameters and potentialities of what a monographic show could be?

HUO: After developing the 'Migrateurs' project and also larger group shows such as 'Nuit Blanche' or 'Live Life', I started to co-curate a series of monographic shows for Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris the idea was to reinvent the very rigid format of the monographic show, we developed a lot of such monographic exhibitions, which means to work very closely with an artist for more than a year. At the same time, this is something which has become a red thread through these monographic shows. First of all, they invent a new display feature to show the work. As Richard Hamilton once told me: 'we will only remember exhibitions that invent a new display feature, another aspect: to invite to invite'. We invite the artist to take over big parts of the museum for a big one person show, a monographic space, and invite him or her at the same time to invite other practitioners with whom they always wanted to work with. For example with Philippe Parreno's monographic show, we asked Philippe whom he has always wanted to work with. We then made the contact to Jaron Lanier, who is the inventor of virtual reality, who wrote somehow the programme for Philippe's show, each time the fish appeared a projection popped up, like a pop-up book and at the same time there was a collaboration between Philippe and François Roche and at the same time we put Olafur Eliasson in touch with Yona Friedman, who did a floating city and with Luc Steels we did experiment and with Steve McQueen, there was the whole story with the NASA and Bill Clancy from Voyager.

In the case of Rirkrit Tiravanija's retrospective which we co-organised with the Serpentine and the Boijmans Museum in Rotterdam it was Tiravanija's desire to involve science fiction writer Bruce Sterling to write a script for the show. Next shows in this series are Doug Aitken, then Pierre Huyghe then Karen Kilimnick, then Cerith Wyn Evans will show a retrospective and at the same time collaborate with the composer Hecker.

PON: You have been an advocate of both Bruce Altshuler's *The Avant-Garde in Exhibition*, and Mary Anne Staniszewski's *The Power of Display*, which are quite key not only for looking at 'amnesia' within the history of exhibitions, but also locating the laboratory years within contemporary curating, do you think that these two books are the beginning of the historicisation of curating?

HUO: There is a missing literature of exhibitions. At a moment when there is so much talk about curating there is no exhibition literature. We have to start with Alexander Dorner in the 1920s in Hanover, then Willem Sandberg in the 1950s in Amsterdam. Many books are missing, there is a whole missing exhibition literature; first of all, the key texts by curatorial pioneers such as Alexander Dorner or Pontus Hulten are mostly out of print and famous radio broadcasts by W. Sandberg (who inspired the generation of Harald Szeemann) are not accessible in English. There are very few examples and that is why they are so welcome, that is why they are so important. There is a missing exhibition literature. It has a lot to do with the fact that exhibitions are not collected and that's why they fall even deeper into amnesia. This is somehow the main part of my 'Interviews' project, that is to somehow write an oral history of exhibitions, that asks scientists, artists, architects equally, to talk about their experiences with exhibitions, and we should also take into account that architects are great curators. I believe in this idea that we should look at curating at large, I mean the motto is somehow 'curating at large', not narrow, but at large. 'Curating at large' means also unexpected curatorships, which means unexpected curatorship: architects as curators, or scientists as curators. Peter Galison from Science in Harvard has fabulous ideas about curating science from which we can learn.

You know my experience with Bruno Latour, when Barbara Vanderlinden and I did 'Laboratorium', we invited Bruno Latour to be involved in the think tank and he curated this section of 'Laboratorium' called 'the table top experiment', which are sort of performative events on a table, where experiments get re-enacted. It was the first time he had been invited to curate something. In terms of such unexpected curatorship the main example remains 'Les Immatériaux' by Jean Francois Lyotard and 'Les Immatériaux' was what you described before, a toolbox so that many people could take things, connect to over many years. I still have the catalogue, it is like a game of cards, and it's like the Eames house of cards. I always play with this catalogue, with the cards.

PON: You have been working with curator Hou Hanru again on the 'Guangzhou Triennial' this year. It continues your play with expansive, transformative, fluctuating exhibition formats. How is this different to the previous Triennial?

HUO: The first Triennial in 2002 took the form of a retrospective of contemporary art in China in the nineties. With this year's exhibition, Hou Hanru and I are connecting an international event to the context in China. Instead of making a large exhibition, we actually decided to do a sustained project, which will last for about eighteen months then in November this year there will be a synthesis into a larger exhibition. The projects brings seminal artists such as Dan Graham, Fischli and Weiss for the first time to China and there is at the same time a strong presence of artists from all over China to show the amazing energy of the local art scene at this very moment. One big potential of any biennial is that very often it is a real spark in the local scene - the biennial is a catalyst or it can produce, in the words of Anri Sala: 'different layers of input on the city'.

END OF TAPE

BRIAN O'DOHERTY

New York, 10-11-05

PAUL O'NEILL: Can you tell me what you remember about the impact of the show 'Primary Structures'?

BRIAN O'DOHERTY: Talking about paradigm shifts, that was a huge paradigm shift and the old souls are true from the romantic and the painterly to these very chaste works, just surrounded by an envelope of an idea, which are also emphasised by the way your own corpus, as you walked around, and you had to, you know, examine it from every side and that sort of carry on, so that you built up the idea of the piece, which then formed what you were seeing, etc., etc. It was a radical show. But I think the most important things were three guys: Flavin, Judd and Andre. They were the trinity I think. And then also Stella with his black paintings, his minimal paintings - they were very important too. It was a very exciting time, so everything was exciting again, because you had the sense of a huge grinding of a gear as the historical model was just shifting, and so it flopped over with a tremendous cloud of dust and illumination and light and fury, and the world had been changed. And the anger of the old generation of painters towards the new work, particularly Pop Art, was intense. And Henry Gelser, who was the curator at the Metropolitan Museum, said something, you know he said, 'The pop artists are sweeter and less hairy'.

PON: How do you see the role of the contemporary art curator having developed during the period from say the mid sixties onwards? Are there particular paradigmatic shifts that you would recognise?

BOD: I think there are, I think there are. One of the great early curators was Dorothy Miller, at the Museum of Modern Art, and she first of all had the prerequisite - can you spot talent before anybody else does? Are you proved right? Do you allow yourself mistakes? What do you learn from those mistakes? And does history then confirm your choices? The change I think is also parallel with the change in the critical pasture, the critical role, which is also again parallel in the yard in literature, because critics in literature feel that their work is equal to the original artwork, that the literary work that they're explicating and devising, illuminating, or confusing, or obscuring. And in the same way I think that the sixties, in the sixties American criticisms certainly matured with people like the Coplans and just a little subset or footnote to that - in the sixties there were mostly

male artists and female critics, so they circumcised the artists. There were great female critics then. I'm thinking of Barbara Rose, I'm thinking of Lucy Lippard, who I think is a giant, Lucy is a giant, etc., etc. But I can explicate that. But there is a definite change in that, and in the curatorial role where the curators became more and more powerful, and they again began to have original ideas. Now something interesting has happened there because in the major museums - and this is something that people can agree with or disagree with - I think the independence and role of the curator has in part been pre-empted by the corporate museum, by trustees that feel that they are every bit as informed as the curator. This is not true, except in rare instances. Something else that's important here - when I was consulting with our Arts Council, one of the things I did was start with government money a programme called Aid to Special Exhibitions under Nancy Hanks - the great Nancy Hanks - H A N K S - who was the major figure in American culture - is dead now, dead at fifty-five, twenty years ago, fifteen years ago. But anyway, I was aware that a curator would go to the director, and the director would say well you know I'm not sure we can do that because we wouldn't get support for it, you wouldn't get an audience you know, and the trustees - because these would communicate with some of the trustees, and even though these are also supposed to be separate, like hell they are. You know trustees are very interfering in my experience. And Nancy Hanks used to say the greatest enemy of the museum is the trustee, which was an extremely radical phrase for a woman who is not going to burn down the Louvre you know. So anyway, my theory was that we give grants to museums, they apply to us for shows, they match the money. So curators and museums would apply, and once the curator got the money it was very hard for the museum or the trustees to stop it. It was federal money, and so they had an edge, a resource, a power, through that money, that gave them independence they wouldn't have had without it. That I think was important. But that's interesting… I don't know what you feel about that yourself, because there are some curators, like that woman, that one who did that 'Documenta' dressed all in black… Catherine David to her credit, at one point, when she did 'Documenta X', she said I'm going to wipe out the 'white cube', which was an admirable thought. People think since I wrote that that I'm married to the white cube, to defend it. It was meant to expose it, to make transparent the assumptions implicit in these five walls, and she made a brave attempt by bringing out doors.

But I was just reading too about another great curator then, Harald Szeemann who was a remarkable guy. And then there's the guy, the Swedish guy Pontus Hulten and he had a run for a while. These guys became superstars didn't they? And it's interesting, it would have been interesting to sit them down and squeeze them and do what you're doing, and find out what the basis of their ideas was, what their attitude to context was, what their attitude to the 'white cube' was, what their historical attitudes were, what their period of history was, etc., etc., because in the sixties the avant-garde motor was seized with a profusion of the new, and then everything has spread out into the sort of estuary. The mainstream is now a muddy estuary isn't it, full of wetlands.

PON: In *Inside the White Cube*, you suggested that galleries were appearing out of time and beyond time - what you called 'an eternity of display'. Do you think that things have shifted beyond this notion of temporality, within the contemporary art gallery?

BOD: Well there are two responses to that. One is, I don't know how you get rid of the 'white cube'. It's there. And commercial galleries still look to me like pretty well white cubes in which the art, in this supposedly neutral space, can establish its own presence and its own set of conditions. Speaking for myself, for installations I've installed in all kinds of places, but a neutral place is best for me. If there's too much architectural static, if the presence of an assertive architect is there as a member of this space out in San Francisco, I couldn't work in it, because the architect was so present, so insistently present. So for my purposes there's a paradox in that I need to do installations, I need a neutral space. But then there are all the attempts to break out of it, and public art in the 1960s and 1970s made many attempts to get out. And we had the sculptural epigram in front of the big curtain wall, you know, and that was studio art really. And I always thought it was like a vasa girl working in the street you know. It didn't work for me. There are very few successful, except the mega projects like Smithson and Hizer and company, but where are the sons of Smithson and Hizer you know, the sons and daughters of Smithson and Hizer?

PON: There's Gordon Matta-Clark…

BOD: Oh he was an extraordinary guy, yeah. He's a great figure - great

figure. But I don't see them around now, do you? There was this move towards the landscape and the move to the immortality, the timelessness of the space. Well the fiction of timelessness is still maintained. Also when you enter a gallery, that timelessness is associated with the usual snob aspect of things, so that I very much believe that the disinfection of that is anti-body. I mean you bring in your messy self, your presumably messy, hopefully deodorised self, into these pristine spaces, and your organic mess is shunting around here rather guiltily while these spic and span galleries, especially if there's a snooty girl on the front desk, give you the perfect appearance, the perfect platform for commerce to be effected. Because I think one of the first things that galleries did was to detach the work from the artist. How do you separate the work from the artist? And one of the things that I should publish sometime, which was a lecture I did called 'Studio and Cube'. And so I don't do that anymore, so when they ask for a lecture, I say Jesus, what have I got? So I've done this lecture out in Kansas, the Franklin Murphy lectures - I don't know when they were, in the eighties I think, late seventies or eighties, early eighties - and so I brushed that up and did it. And it was brought home to me very clearly that in their natural habitat in the studio the works pretty well casual, they don't have any rhetoric of presentation for the most part. They're lived with, their aesthetic value is not established, it's somewhat unstable still, and it hasn't been processed through the system. And for the most part you learn more about it in the studio, when you visit a studio, than you do when it's in the gallery. And there's something enormously attractive about that, and Daniel Buren was so eloquent about the effects on art moving from and depreciating as it moves from the studio and as it moves, and how it depreciates as it moves into a formal stage. Now my point was, or is, that for the purposes of commerce you have to detach the work from the artist, and the artist has to be in Coventry or removed from it. There's nothing more obtuse and pathetic, and I'm speaking for myself too, than the presence of the artist at the opening, he's like a superfluous animal, so to get rid of him, that's the dealers' desire. And once the work is detached from the artist then it's subject to commerce, and then it has its extraordinary apotheosis in the auction house. And if you're reading the Christie's thing there recently, there are you know twenty million dollars for this work that originally sold for seven. So some of these artists still living, they don't get any of it. That was another issue - how the artists benefit

from the serialised sales of their work as a percentage, to turn that into law. That one failed.

PON: One of the things that are rarely touched upon in relation to *Inside the White Cube* is this idea of the ritualisation of the experience of art. And although the book predominantly deals with the spatial experience of art, and perhaps looking at Duchamp as sort of idea of an alternative to the 'white cube' installational experience, you said that as viewers or as experiencers, people who experience these spaces, 'we absent ourselves in favour of the eye and the spectator'. Do you think that's still a recurring kind of, I suppose, metaphor if you like?

BOD: Well the whole thing was, do you have an eye? Remember that still is true. Do you have an eye? You can take that model how you wish; everybody takes that according to his or her own response. That was how I responded to it, you know, whether it's viable or not I think is that split I think. There's something that… there is a split there in the notion of the spectator, and the perception of the spectator, and the attitude of the art towards the spectator and the art defines the choreography of the spectator. So for me that was true, for others it wouldn't be.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA* by Mary Anne Staniszewski, she highlights what she calls an 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibition and display practice of the past. This is something that you've touched upon also, or actually called 'radical forgetting' in relation to art history. Do you think that this 'amnesia' or this 'radical forgetting' has affected the way in which we perceive contemporary art curating?

BOD: Absolutely. I was always struck by the fact that in New York in the sixties and seventies - and the eighties were another matter because painting returned and was just painting and there was commerce and there was this, that and the other - but in the sixties and seventies there was… Take Flavin - when I first saw Flavin I said he's Barney Numan in lights, right. And nobody said that. And so that's not a very accurate model of the kind of thing I mean, but again I would see work and I'd say well but that's so and so, or Rauschenberg did that, or so and so

did that. And of course not doing, and doing, not doing what somebody else has done was the primary issue of originality, but originality was legitimised, if that's the word, or illegitimately legitimised, by a real suppression of the source. And I've found that to be true again and again, I think that's still true. If everything is… There's so many people who, with great superb cool, present something as totally radical, when it isn't, and if the force of their polemic is such that you can convince a couple of writers, a couple of magazines, a couple of collectors, a couple of museums, you're home free.

PON: The Duchamp model of exhibition intervention if you like, and also people like El Lissitzky or Alexander Dorner during the twenties and thirties, and perhaps the Surrealists in particular, was that they were critiquing this kind of easy consumption within what was becoming a modernist mode of consumer culture. So by actually activating the viewer's kind of spatiality, it was critiquing the prioritisation of the gaze of the look within modern spaces.

BOD: That's all true, I think that's all true, and you're really talking about the Museum of Modern Art streamlined mainstream, which is Cézanne right through to Picasso and Matisse, and associates. If you go to the Modern you'll see how badly they deal with anything conceptual, how Surrealism is, you've got to deal with this slum, this kind of what do with this slum, it doesn't fit. And so the Modern has been resolutely about the eye, exactly as you say, and so that there are whole segments of art that they ignore.

PON: Which is something that actually Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights in her book, and what she highlights is, because exhibition installations and exhibitions as a whole are ephemeral, and that they're outside objecthood and few images survive of these installations, like we maybe have two, maybe three images of 'Mile of String' by Duchamp which you can, incarnates this entire installation. And her point was that MOMA in particular kind of avoided or has avoided or has somehow denounced this kind of history, particularly people like, even people like Frederick Kiesler who would have been, you know worked without Alfred Barr in the thirties and forties, and basically produced quite spatial displays as opposed to visual displays.

BOD: He was a fascinating guy. He's this very tiny guy, and he was not well treated here, because he was desperate for recognition. It was not a good thing to be. And you would see some genius. His widow is still around - what's her name? I've forgotten her name. But anyway Kiesler was such an engaging guy, and his theatre installations he did as his artwork, which was unusual, but nobody would take it seriously. And I remember his death was… he was most appreciated in his death. There was a party and Rauschenberg painted a tyre and sent it spinning away, and there were all sorts of celebrations of Kiesler's death. He was a nice fellow, but many Europeans had a lot of trouble over here, because this is a very flat, pragmatic, show me kind of town, and it is not a particularly theoretical town. And this is not a town for manifestos or utopian transformations.

PON: In the after words of the standard edition of *Inside the White Cube* you say that 'art used to be made for illusion, now it is made from illusions'. So let's expand upon that.

BOD: That was a perspective illusion of the painting, and what I meant very sharply was that - how can I put it? - the complex, the matrix, which sustains the artificial cycle from studio to auction house, to museum, and around again, is sustained in my view by very illusory values which have really nothing to do with art. I'm not saying it well, but I should be pressed on it.

PON: You also said that, in the early part of the book, that galleries, modern 'gallery spaces were constructed along lines as rigorous as those for the building of a mediaeval church'. Do you still think that this idea of the religious experience of art is still kind of key to the way in which we experience contemporary art within galleries and museums today?

BOD: Yes and no. I think that was has happened is that the 'white cube' has been seen as a counter in the game. It is not an unperceived constant within which you're unconsciously confined. It is perceived as a unit of discourse in itself, and the huge affluence of installation art since the seventies has treated it very roughly. And it has become anything you want it to be, it's become a movie theatre, it's become an unnatural paradise, you bring in all sorts of junk from the outside. It

has become a studio, people bring in their studios, and if we're talking about the idea of the cube, so-called, which isn't a cube of course, I just called it that because it was conceptually, I knew it would be conceptually assimilated. You could swallow 'the idea of a white cube', which is often a white rectangle and people still call it that - it's interesting because it never was a cube, but I knew that the cube idea you conceptualise, you see it in your head, you see a cube in your head, a white cube in your head. It's very visualised, the appetite of the mind consumes it to see such an image with great facility, and then inside it was the mysterious realm of all kinds of skullduggery and transformation and bullshit. Anyway, I think to answer your question - I must stop this meandering - the gallery through installation can be anything you want it to be. So that's a huge transformation from the chaste and walls where at one-point dealers wouldn't let you touch their walls, they were something that a shudder was put through them if you attacked their walls. And so then they became very permissive as time went on, and I have done my share of using gallons of paint, which they then have to white out in three or four coats and what have you. But it's, I think that's the real, after the white cube notion, I think there is the whole department of painting. If we're thinking of the house of post-modernism, just as the house of modern here we've the department of painting where all the painters are painting away and then the eye is working right, here are the department of installation, here is the department of whatever, you know there's so many, they're on the spectacle. And here is the department of intimacy in a small work; here is the department of whatever. There are many mansions in this post-modern house, and however it seems to me one and all they are subject to commerce and subject to the old circulation, and the circulatory, sustaining circulation and circulatory system of sustained art since modernism matured. It's still there. And the magazines really, no matter how independent they are, they depend completely on their ads, as their circulations were never very high. I think *Art News* is something like eighty thousand, I think *Art in America* is about fifty thousand, I think *Artforum* is, what, about twenty, twenty-five? So they're very small circulations for the contrast of the vast numbers of people going into museums, listening to these wretched things in their ears, which truly are in my view an audience that should be examined on an examination table before they went to the museum - why the fuck are you going in there when you know nothing about it anyway? What did you get

out of it? But that's another issue, the issue of the audience and the museum, which we have to get into, but it is, it's one that I have a very elitist attitude towards. And I was booed at some panel recently - I should never do panels but I did this one, and I was booed for somebody saying but your attitude is so elitist. That's absolutely right, of course it is, and that's another subject isn't it?

PON: One of the key issues to emerge I think in the last twenty years is this idea of the curator as meta-artist, which has been kind of associated with people like Hans Ulrich Obrist or Jens Hoffmann etc. Is there a particular moment where you would be able to recognise where that kind of idea kind of emerged?

BOD: There's a saying in literature that the critic became as important as the work of literature that they were working on. In the same way, the critic, in terms of French post-structuralism, became as important as the work. And they say it themselves, as important as the work to which they, we, are criticising or explicating or dealing with. And in the same way the curator became more important in some ways than the artist. I think all these are parallel streams, which are very identifiable. As to what the moment of their origin is, in literature I think it was the new criticism of the 1950s it was I. A. Richards, like and poems were kind of made for this machine. Greenberg was never a polemical critic in that sense I think. You can read him several ways. I'm not a great Greenberg admirer, I think he's vastly overrated, but then I may be wrong. Hal Foster to me is a brilliant thinker.

PON: You mentioned Lucy Lippard and there was Seth Siegelaub who is often cited as the first so-called independent curator.

BOD: I remember. Lucy did some transforming shows. She did 'Soft Sculpture', she did - I forget the name of the shows now, but she did some amazing transformative shows. I thought she was, still do, enormous respect for Lucy. And she also never compromised, and she became very socially conscious, and has kept that faith unfailingly, to this day. And she became very socially active actually. She lives down in New Mexico. I don't know what… Then the curators did become more important in the 1960s, the sixties is a time that's never been repeated, and everything that's here now is in the sixties.

PON: One of the key words that Seth Siegelaub used to clarify the changing role of the curator within contemporary art exhibitions was the word 'demystification' in order to kind of unravel the relationship between curator and artist. How relevant do you think this term is still in terms of contemporary practice?

BOD: Well I think that demystification is a medium in which we currently work. Do you know the 'Aspen 5+6' that I did in 1967? That was the first conceptual exhibition outside a museum. The first conceptual exhibition is generally given to Mel Bochner, a few months before that, in which he got artists' notebooks and he exhibited them at, I think it was the New School, or the School of Visual Arts - one of these places; it's in the history books - and Alex Alberro was the historian of conceptualism here. And the thing I did, it's worth looking up, it's a fair bit of literature about it, because I went around with my little tape recorder and I produced this box, in a way it was a cube - and in it were records, films, texts of my generation; I had Bochner and Sol LeWitt and Dan Graham, and myself, and had the first structure, my first structural plays, Sol's first serial piece, etc., etc. And I had a set of ancestors. Alex Alberro has a piece about it twenty or thirty years later in *Artforum* a couple of years back, but that was, that made quite a fuss, that made quite an impact. Over here I got Susan Sontag to write on 'The Aesthetics of Silence', I got Roland Barthes to write about 'The Death of the Author', Lucy Lippard mentioned it briefly in *Six Years…*, she mentions it briefly, but not enough. It was very influential actually, if I say so myself. I had John Cage in there, Feldmann, who was an old pal - dead now. I even got texts from Rob Grillé, and texts from Beckett. I called up Beckett and told him what I was doing, and then he said, 'Actually I haven't a scrap', he said, 'Actually I haven't a scrap' - very familiar and homely and very pleasant. And I was waiting for that, I knew he was going to come through, and I said, 'Well you've done texts for nothing and I'd like to take text number this - would you mind reading it for me?' He said, 'Actually I couldn't read it', he said; 'you have to get Jack MacGowan to read it'. So this was conducted, I got Rob Grillé to read the extract I wanted from *Jealousy*, and blah blah blah - it's a big number that - and so I got Jack, old Jack MacGowan to read it, and so I'm eagerly receiving it you know on these reel tapes - they didn't have

cassettes then - and so I'm putting it on and suddenly the damn thing stops, in the middle, and I call up Jack and I said, 'Jack what the hell's up? This stops'. He said, 'Actually that's as far as the money brought me'. So I went back. And a lot of the people never got paid, I was ashamed, but I was so bloody focused on that and got it out. That's considered the first exhibition, conceptual exhibition outside a museum, because it's been shown as an exhibition in museums frequently. And it's well worth looking up if you have the time. If we had time I'd dig one up and we'd spend time with it but…

PON: Why did you at the time, in '67, did you have a need to curate or organise 'Aspen'?

BOD: I'll tell you, that's a very good question, because Morton Feldman and I were very good friends, and we used to discuss endlessly all these matters, and we were in New York, and blah blah, and he was closely associated with the Abstract Expressionists, particularly Philip Guston, and Morty was a brilliant guy and I admired his music very much, and I was also into serial language, right - one to five, one to five, four sets of one to five, a little like serial music, and there's a German magazine called *Erie*. So Morty gave me clues when I needed them and he talked about how… he said 'You guys have come from out of town' - he was Brooklyn I think - 'You guys can kind of come in here and take over' he said, and so he talked about how it's important to pass through the city, pass through New York, pass through your ancestors. This is coming from… I'd come from Dublin to Cambridge to Harvard, and then down here, and so I had taken a long course to get here - to me this was the 'promised land', and I very much wanted to be a New York artist. And so I had to assimilate it all and have that immediate history passed through me as it were. And so I elected my own ancestors from Cage and Morty to Duchamp - I got Duchamp to read. I went with my tape recorder, went down, and he read for me *A L'Infinitif*. And then I went to… I was doing this in terms of contrasts. This was the ostensible armature of the whole thing between excess and reduction. Cage would be excess, Feldmann would be reduction. And I was also doing Vowel poems in those days, I did read these Vowel poems and I have recorded them, and I got all this stuff into this great compendium. For films I got Bob Rauschenberg, and then I got Robert Morris' very chaste and minimal piece where he's manipulating the cardboard - remember that - so there

was another. So that ostensible contrast between excess and reduction was simply the ostensibly simple and easily perceived armature in which I was able to create all kinds of patterns, and develop three themes, and five movements. The themes were time, history and something else, and the movements were constructivism, through what I called 'the tradition of paradoxical thinking'. We wanted it in because this is a big subject, but it is the box, and in the box the films by Hans Richter, and there was a gallery made in those days, and Moholy-Nagy's light machine, another contrast between excess and reduction. So this was a transformative thing. And I even worked it out in Berkeley, because we were teaching out in Berkeley that summer of '67 I think it was, so I was getting all this and working with the guys in Europe and bringing my little tape recorder and around New York and picking up these shards of history that were just deposited. New York is an amazing place like that, like Paris must have been years ago when you had all political types and what have you in exile. So I had this, which I never have, which I don't have now, of this sense that I was gathering together and focusing something that was in transit to the future, which Irving Sander and others called this, was one of the key documents of that period. I wish you could see it. I'll be leaving tomorrow morning, but what I will do is I will xerox the contents - let me make a note of that because I forget everything.

PON: Just to return to *Inside the White Cube*, why do you think that *Inside the White Cube* has become such a classic publication? Why do you think it's still of interest to many scholars of the history of exhibition making, and why do you think that very little literature has come out of *Inside the White Cube*?

BOD: Yes starting to come out now, thirty years later. But it's beginning now. Why is that? I've no idea. I suppose it hit a nerve. What happened was - here's something interesting - in my experience if you do something that hits the nerve, half a dozen people will come up to you and say 'I was just about to write that'. That happened when I did that, which told me that, true or false, some of them have never put a word together in their lives. But what happened on this project in *Artforum*, they sold out like that. There was quite a fuss, and so it must have hit a nerve somewhere. And I've just watched it with all, because it's not of interest to me anymore, you know people talk to me

as if I had some sort of answers to all these questions, which I don't have at all, but it was just to make… It's part of my, I suppose, scepticism and suspicion of establishments, and I very much wanted to… There's something… profoundly odious about unchallenged power, and Colour Field resided very happily within this system and attempts to attack it, you know, would just really reinforce it. I mean look what's happening in Washington, they had a perfect system of suppression, they had a perfect system to enable them to do whatever they wanted by the creation of this, what they called their reality, which was nothing to do with this reality. One of the most astonishing things ever said - did you remember they said that? Yeah they said no we had… we deal with our reality; your reality is something else. It was astonishing. It almost leads you to schizophrenic breakdown, because this administration, whatever your politics, has been the big lie - Hitler was the big lie - they have been the most effective manipulators of mendacity that I've ever come across. It's extraordinary how successful they've been. The book has now they've translated it in South America, a few years ago they translated it - somebody in Taiwan, and this sort of thing. So what's your reaction to that? What do you feel about it?

PON: I would say that since the early nineties in particular there is a kind of shift away from art criticism and artists' historical work within academia towards curation, so there's a lot more curation students now than there are students of art criticism. So therefore there's a lot of literature that needs to be consumed, and there is a lack of literature. And one of the key texts to be written in relation to the sixties and seventies is your publication, and I think the reprint of that obviously helped, because it was out of print for a while. I think that the role of Duchamp as a curator and an exhibition designer has still yet to be kind of re-established as there are a lot of people who are interested in Duchamp in that context. But I also think that it's one of the few books of its time that deals with the spatiality of the experience of art as opposed to the visuality of the experience of art or the conceptualisation of art, because it doesn't really deal with concept, it doesn't really deal with the visual, it deals with the spatial but in relation to the conceptual and the visual. And there are more students of curation now than there ever were…

BOD: That's astonishing.

PON: There are more curatorial programmes than there ever were.

BOD: Where do they all go?

END OF TAPE


PQ

SARAH PIERCE

London, 21-05-05

PAUL O'NEILL: So can you tell me about your first curatorial project?

SARAH PIERCE: I still don't know if I would name as a curatorial practice or project but when I was in New York often what I would do, I did a couple of things that at the time I would have called self-organised practice projects and so one was with two people that I was collaborating with, Lynne Slatering who's a child sex abuse specialist and this other woman who's an artist named Kelly Swain and we just all had a similar interest in doing a project together and for lack of a space we decided to organise it in this big loft that Kelly lived in and that was basically an architect's office. And so that was the first thing that I was working on as both an artist making the work, collaborating with the two of them and then also doing everything from the invitation design, getting the opening organised, it was actually a one night thing so it was a very concentrated event. This was in 1998 I think and then the next year I did a project with a friend of mine who's also an artist, Emily Clark, which was also a one night thing where we did an open call for video and it was a very loose and wide ranging open call where we sent stuff out over the internet but also just asked people to send us stuff and we ended up getting a ton of video and from that we were very particular in selecting. I would say we got 40 and we selected 10 to do a one night screening and that was on her rooftop in her studio apartment on Varick Street and that was again a one night, one off screening that we called 'Overheard Oversight' and that was using the city as a backdrop to the projection so we set up a freestanding screen and about 200 people came and it was, we did it as a screening, like one after the other - people were sitting and actually watching it as a screening. And then there was a party afterwards and so those two situations were really about trying to organise stuff in New York on my own terms and both of those were in collaborative situations.

PON: And what were the practices in New York you were looking at

the time?

SP: Well at the time I was, myself I was making video and so that's what I was interested in and I was using video and using sound and I was actually working with other people in specific situations and so I was very rarely just making something and having it exhibit on its own and so, and just the way that New York works, and the way that space works. I always felt slightly alienated from the idea of the curator coming into the studio, looking at your work, selecting something and then taking it out to a group show or a gallery or something and I always really resisted it. And so on, the only time I really ever showed my work in New York was when I knew the person who was curating it and we had a relationship and so then I guess as an artist what I was trying to do, in those two situations, was to do something outside of the gallery system and it wasn't necessarily working against it, it wasn't that I was trying to reject that system, I mean it's no way to really to do that in New York but it was that I wasn't really involved in that system and I didn't really feel like there was a way to do things within that system at the time. I was also, I was working at Artist Space prior to both of those projects and I was curating but they were doing a web kind of project and I would sort of select something every month I think to put on their website as a kind of artist's project on the web, but at the time I didn't locate or name any of that as curatorial work or curated projects, it was more really seeing myself as an artist organising things to make them happen, things that I wanted to have happen.

PON: So when would you have decided to use the term curator or the adjective curatorial in relation to your practice?

SP: Well I actually, I mean I never really have, I mean other people, I've never described myself like in terms of when you're in that position where you have to kind of describe what you do as a curator but what's interesting to me is that's how other people

have described what I do and so…

PON: Are you comfortable with the term?

SP: It's funny because I don't really have any problems with the term curator but I do, I guess because I'm aware that peers of mine are curators in that they've been trained in the practice and I haven't, that my approach really in relation to research is very different, and most of the things that I've quote unquote 'organised' have not been based on years of curatorial research and so I do see there is a difference between what is named in terms of what I'm doing curating or being a curator but I think it's really, so no one in New York was referring to me as a curator, like with those projects that I was doing I wasn't known as a curator and it really wasn't until I moved to Dublin and I got the job as Artistic Director of Art House that people started referring to me as a curator and, but it's funny because about a year after the whole Art House thing closed and I was working in Dublin, I applied for a grant that the Arts Council does, it's like a curatorial internship and I applied with Project Gallery. I think it's about 10,000 euro to subsidise work with an institution as a curator and I was, the reply that I got back from them was that I was over qualified and I remember thinking at the time if self-organising a few things in New York and then doing like a 15 month gig as an Artistic Director, where I was working with artists and curating, like selecting and curating stuff, but if that makes me over qualified in this context then it really made me realise that curating in the context of Dublin is a loose term on a certain level.

PON: Why did you decide to do the Whitney Independent Study Programme and when did you do that?

SP: At the time I did it, I'd just done an MA at Cornell and I knew people who had done the Whitney programme and they convinced me that it was a really good way to move to New York, I wanted to

move to New York after that because it's in upstate New York and I'd been in Los Angeles and I was just kind of like how can I get to New York and at the time I was studying with Blake Simpson and Helen Molesworth and they both suggested that it was a really good way to get there and Fraser Ward too and so they convinced me to go ahead and apply.

PON: And what kind of expectations did you have of the programme?

SP: I mean to be really honest about it I was really using it as a way to move to New York and it's sort of like an instant family when you move to New York - you arrive and there's 30 other people or like 25 other people who are arriving with you in that situation and I was lucky, I mean the year that I was there, there were some really great people there who are still really my closest friends in relation to the art world and not even, I shouldn't even say like in relation to the art world, like closest friends full stop. And so my expectations for the Whitney Programme were that it would provide me a place to be in New York, provide me with a context, a place to relate myself to, that would give me a relation to New York which it did, I mean it really did and at the time I went as a studio artist and it was really within that year that my interests in critical studies and what at the time was being called cultural studies really, where I was really able to hone in on that part of practice and I didn't expect that to happen, I mean I knew it would be rigorous in terms of theory but that's really what happened for me in that situation.

PON: And how do you think it impacted upon your practice as a whole?

SP: I think that what it did was it absolutely gave me a particular perspective because it is an educational experience and so that education combined with the MA at Cornell combined with my undergraduate experience really has and the residue is all there and it's very much shaped my relationship to art and how I think

about art and how I think of practice. And in the conversations that took place in that space were challenging and that really has instilled me with this idea that this type of participation in culture is something that is formed through critical thinking and probably if I hadn't done the Whitney Programme I don't know if that would be the case to such an extent, I mean I felt that way at Cornell too but that's really where I come from and now it's hard to get out of that and I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing. I mean I've definitely learned that there's a flexibility there too from being outside of that context, outside of New York and living in Dublin and having closer proximity to other projects in Europe and knowing that not everyone comes from this very specific perspective but also recognising that which I think is important too.

PON: So how would you define your practice?

SP: I would define it, well right now I'd define it as an art practice that is based in using different lines of enquiry or different meta-discourses that are performed within what we know as the art world so talks, exhibitions, publications, so things that are already present, that are already there, the structures that people use all the time. And I try to use those depending on what the situation is and what I kind of want to engage with in the situation. So at this point as an art practice I don't make discrete works of art and so that's perhaps why people on one level think that at times I'm curating or organising more than I'm art making because it's true, that is more how you could describe what I do but I don't really like to define my practice on a certain level too because I think that in some ways that makes it too easy for people and I think that what is, what I think is important about what I'm doing right now is that as opposed to trying to blur the boundaries between the artist and curator - which has sort of like become fashionable and a way to talk about something that's sort of imprecise as a practice - I think that what I'm doing is precise but it doesn't necessarily fit within

the rubric of art making or curating and I think that it's actually a third thing that a lot of artists are doing, and there's a lot of people who are working in this way but I've been accused of just organising people's lives and when I've given talks about my work you know, there's been the questions or the accusations from the back of the room as to how is this art and why is this art and in some ways I'm not really interested in just answering them because I don't really see where they shed light on what I'm doing you know.

PON: Do you recognise any dominant forms of curatorial practice during the period that you've been making projects or organising projects?

SP: Yes and I think that because of different types of curation, because there's been a prevalence of late with people like perhaps Matthew Higgs whose practice as an artist definitely rubs off on his practice as a curator, and there's people whose work isn't as clear, where their art isn't really with clear differentiations and I think that that's influenced curatorial practice quite a bit. The artists and their interest in participating and engaging beyond the confines of just being in a studio, making things, having someone come in or transporting the work to another context, that there's so many people right now who are working and who perhaps have training as artists, who are really interested in different types of input into that process, that it's not just their singular input and so I think that that's really where I come from because everything that I'm doing right now as an artist really has input from at least one other person, even in the case of designing and sort of conceptualising a web project that I've just done to, and working with Sven Anderson on that to projects like this one with 'Coalesce' at Redux, London where it's all about the kind of input of the people who come in and have conversations with me and so or the 'Metropolitian Complex' newspapers work that way too. And so in some ways it's like I've never thought of art as something that's done in that precise

singular way with one person's idea and one person's output and I think that there's certain curatorial practices that seem to work in that way too where it's not just the curator coming up with the theme and the idea of curating is seeing what other input can come into a situation and how that can have meaning. And so in that way I think what I'm doing is very aligned with those particular curatorial practices and also with artists who are working like that.

PON: In the nineties one of the dominant perceptions of the curator was as meta-artist and more recently there has been a shift away from the curator as meta-artist towards the artist as meta-curator and I am thinking of people as wide ranging as Apolonija Sustersic, The Danger Museum, Superflex, 16Beaver Street or Goshka Macuga, Matti Braun etc. do you think that that's true, or how and why do you think that has developed?

SP: Well I guess it's like in some ways I feel we need another term because in this dichotomy between meta- artist and meta-curator seems to presume that there's some sort of consensus in terms of what it is to be an artist or what it is to be a curator and I don't think that there is consensus. I think that there's a lot of different artists out there and there's a lot of different curators out there and that right now in terms of a contemporary situation there's a lot of people whose practice - and that word practice comes up so much because it's you know, but it is a practice - is something that's experimental, that's changing and someone like Apolonija has as you know formal training as an architect and architects work very collaboratively and conceptually and so I think that that plays into what she's doing right now as an artist but I would never think of her as artist as meta-curator at all. And so it's kind of like the problem is if an artist and what they're doing has many different inputs into that, why is that somehow equated with being a curator, why can't that also be seen as an art practice and I think it often is an art practice it's just different from someone who's doing

something in a more kind of singular way. I mean there's still an author, there's still someone who's in charge, it's still on my terms and Apolonija's terms and those final decisions are definitely made by someone.

PON: Do you think it's a question of authorship then and what kind of author do we have whether it's an artist or a curator who is responsible for production of the project? How can we differentiate these two auteur positions?

SP: Well I think that in some ways we're talking about traditions, I think we're talking less about art practice versus curatorial practice and more traditional art practice versus what might be a less kind of traditional art practice and traditional curatorial practices versus a different type of perhaps newly formed curatorial practice. So I mean traditionally the curator was not an author because what the curator was basically charged with was a very historical preservation of works and accumulating those, making sure that they're taken care of and if they were presented - it was always under this guise of anonymity so the work, the kind of Dutch fourteenth century drawing show goes up and all the curatorial intent and all of the curatorial kind of statement is like written in these anonymous text or wall panels or if it is a text signed by the curator it's very much within the realm of art history. I think that it's not a coincidence that the practices that we're talking about, that are perhaps not traditional, are dealing with contemporary work usually and so it's just kind of a different, it's a different way to, so that kind of role I think of the author is much more apparent but it's kind of always there and I think that it's actually mistaken when people kind of see a collaborative project as though that's going to abolish the author when actually that's rarely the case with collaboration. I mean if you think of the most collaborative art form is probably film and there's always the director. It's something that's come up around, that I've heard in relation to my work and this kind of naming of the 'Metropolitan Complex' and is that a way to author

it and it's kind of like well yes there's an identity there, there's something to recognise there.

PON: But you've also curated exhibitions which have been more shall we say traditional like the 'Living in the Clouds' show at the RHA, Dublin?

SP: Yes, and that was really about a traditional kind of contemporary format and yes it was about being asked by the institution to curate something so that being seen as my role. And then within that inviting six artists or six players into that, commissioning new work within that and then putting it all together and me being the kind of final say in terms of how it's going to be displayed and stuff but also within that context I did a paper that you were involved with too in terms of, that took place in the RHA in the artist studio and in some ways I saw that as a very kind of self-reflective moment within the space, like including one of the 'Metropolitan Complex' papers within that drew attention for me if not for anybody else, drew attention to that idea of a role and that there's conversations that happen behind the scene and that there's a director here and there are other people who are involved with organising and curating and artistic practices and they all kind of overlap in a certain way and so to allow that conversation to be part of the show and the thing that people would take away from the show I think was important to include. But there was also a catalogue for the show too that was very traditionally laid out, like all of the artists and their practices.

PON: Are there particular curatorial models or historical exhibitions or historical precedents that have made an impact on your practice?

SP: This is where I draw a blank as a curator because I didn't study that stuff so it's really the most general idea that I have on a certain level, and it's funny because I always feel that with

my art practice, if you want to differentiate, there's very few artists that influence that practice and then if you wanted to look at what might be a curatorial practice there's very few curators so I would say that on a certain level, there are people who I'm influenced by in terms of their take on things so for instance Robert Smithson's essay on 'Cultural Confinement' is something I've really thought about and I've thought about the fact that that was written for a 'Documenta' catalogue and that this idea of the 'Metaphysical Junkyard' and what we're actually doing when we place objects in a cultural space for 4-6 weeks, what's actually happening, what are we causing to happen in that situation. And so that's, his kind of, and also his 'Hotel Palenca' project I think of being able to recognise outside of the cultural space really important contributions and really important moments of reflection and activity that aren't necessarily marked and defined by a curator or by an institution or by an artist and that to me has been really important in terms of things that I've put together like the St. Pappan's Ladies Club and working with people like UltraRed. Also in terms of practices, I think it's really interesting in the *Thinking About Exhibitions* book, some of the historical references in that book like the Yves Klein shows that took place in Paris in the early 60s and realising that what we might see now is this idea of the meta-artist/ meta-curator, is that actually artists have been interested in for a really long time in terms of how their output is confined or what happens to it and this relationship between institution, audience, artist, and how that gets played out. And so I wouldn't say that there's direct references in that like visually you can see like ok I'm looking at these influences and then they end up here in terms of historical references. But yes historically I think it's very interesting and very important to be able to not necessarily situate yourself in relation to something that's taken place before but where you can actually recognise that things have taken place before and that whether you're conscious of it or not, there's something, it's not fatalistic, but there's a particular sort of repetition happening there that maybe if anyone's looked

into this and I think it's quite interesting even if you think about it politically, this idea of blurring and overlapping and of practices not being as easily defined and why that is.

PON: Or perhaps they've never been so easily defined.

SP: Yes and what's our investment in thinking they have been, what are we trying to hold onto, is that just like some strange nostalgia or is it something that we feel like we're missing.

PON: In *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls a repressed history or an 'amnesia' towards curatorial practices of the past particularly the role of artists and architects like Frederic Kiesler and Marcel Duchamp and Lilly Reich and Herbert Bayer etc., do you think that this notion of a repressed history has ultimately impacted on the way in which we perceive contemporary curating?

SP: It's funny because just when you mention that as a historical reference, the person who popped into my head was Eva Hesse and how when you see photographs of her studio space, and I remember this when I had a studio space, I really loved the arrangement of the objects within that space and realising that there is a certain loss or something not gained when it leaves that space and I think that she had people into her studio all the time and that's how her peers got to know her and her practice. I think that idea of a repressed history is probably true in that we really perhaps don't realise how connected we are to how we might walk into a space and think it's new and use words that I think are ridiculous like new or innovative, even the word experimental can be loosely repressive in a certain way, in some ways how it's applied and so, and then when you start to really delve into the history and see the photographic representations of shows, I mean even like the 'Degenerate Art' show, when you think about it as a curated proposition, it's pretty amazing and then when you collapse that model onto shows that you might see today and see

how that works and what's included and what's not included and to realise that curating is about exclusions and inclusions and it's about telling stories about culture and making sure, or it's telling stories about the present culture even if it's a historical exhibition and the fact that those stories, the majority of them are told within institutional spaces is I think something again that Robert Smithson was playing with and questioning and wondering about because I think it is repressive.

PON: Since the late 1980s there's been an ever expanding and increasing number of international art biennials, which is ultimately the bi-product, which has created a higher level of visibility for a certain kind of mobile curator within a global context. Do you think that we need more international art biennials?

SP: I think the really unfortunate thing about them. I would answer that if you want a simple answer I'd say 'no' because I think that again we have to look at what's being lost in that situation and I think that what's being lost is that there's a set of people that the only way that they see work is within the situation of going from biennial to art fair to triennial and so even though I think recently with recent 'Documenta' and recent biennials like in Istanbul there's been a sort of proclamation of including local, what's called maybe regional practices, something happens when they're in that context that I don't necessarily think that those shows shouldn't be there it's just that as a visitor to them you have to realise that they're very particular and that even regional practices that might be included, they change somewhat within that context and so I think there's going to be more before there's less, I think it's something that it's almost like becoming politically and economically something that pretty much every city around the globe is starting to think whether that's a film festival or an art biennial. So then you start to really see how money, tourism, mobility, and all of these things play into those moments but I should also say that I'm

speaking from the experience of not having gone to very many of them at all and so this is all my imagination, just like this is what I'm imagining what happens with them and probably a lot of the work that I know is because of those shows too and so I think you have to assess whether that's a good thing or a bad thing because I think that we know a lot more about each other and about each other's practices and about what's out there and who's out there because of those moments too.

PON: Okwui Enwezor made the point that if you were to take the two dominant ways in which we experience art i.e. one being the contemporary and modern art museum and the second being the international biennial, that the experience of art in the biennial context is much more generous than in a museum context when you consider that most modern art museums either own the same work or show the same work by the same particular artists so there's a kind of inability for it to actually move forward somehow.

SP: That could be true but I would also have to bring up the economics of the situation because part of the reason why I haven't gone to very many of these shows is because there's the cost of the plane ticket, the cost of the week off of work and the cost of the hotel and the drinks and so in that way is that generous or is that actually quite, I don't know.

PON: But his point was that you're more than likely to see something that you haven't seen before in a biennial than if you walk into any museum in the world whether it's in San Paolo or whether it's in New York or whether it's in Paris.

SP: This is what I would question now because for instance if I walk into the museum in Portland Maine where my parents live, I'm going to see work that would never be in any of these biennials by regional artists, that is work that is there because someone who's curating or who's on the staff has organised it and if he's thinking about big museums and big collections that could be true

but there's a lot of museums out there and there's a lot of different museums out there. It's hard to make that generalisation on a certain level because I think that also there's loads of people who end up in biennials and I can probably think of more examples of repetitions that happen to people who are on the 'Documenta', European biennial circuit whose work I do see a lot and I see it basically pretty much only in those contexts and while I might not see them in museums, the big museums are actually collecting those artists because they've been in 'Documenta', because they've been in the biennials. So I think it's much more closely circuited than perhaps is recognisable when you walk through the doors of a museum but certainly just the names that are popping into my head right now are people who have been in 'Documenta', in one of the last two 'Documenta' and are also in museum collections and it's rare that a curator of any of these situations has from what I can tell, where the predominant work has been work that, there might be one or two examples of work that you wouldn't see in a museum or you'd have to travel to that specific location to engage with the artists who are involved with it or who made it but it's predominantly people who are and who want their work to be in collections.

PON: What do you think happens with the kind of practice that you're engaged with within the international biennial context if you look at Bonami's Venice, 2004 or Okwui Enwezor's 'Documenta' where there was a number of practices which you could call 'socially engaged' or politically engaged or collaborative or involved in a production and creation of types of socio-political spaces and when that's taken out of that context within which it's produced and then exhibited within an art international context, what do you think happens with the work?

SP: I think the key to that is a really good question and it's a question that I think needs to be asked over and over again by curators and artists and also by the audience too. I mean the thing about these big international shows is that we the curators

and the artists are the majority of the audience for these shows and so I think we do need to ask what happens to those practices because there's a certain lens that's put onto those practices when they're placed within these big international scenarios and while on one level I think that that's interesting what happens, perhaps what it does is to provide another answer, another option, something else to hope for, something experimental like within that context but as I said, like they're usually not what's prevailing within that context. Usually it is one artist making something and then those kind of socially based practices like maybe one or two examples within the entire show and so I think that there's all sorts of negatives that might happen like they might be tokenistic, like are curators including these practices because they feel like ok you have the three big names, does it become formulaic and then you have a couple of the socially engaged things happening too and are those practices always sort of on the side. And in terms of audience I think that that's the biggest question that comes up in relation to a socially engaged or perhaps locally based project being included in 'Documenta' is that it's always going to be the marker of that practice like the signifiers of that practice as opposed to actually what's really taking place socially in the process because usually in that context it's something that's being viewed as opposed to being engaged in as a process.

PON: John Miller made the point that we shouldn't be criticising the curatorial selection within blockbuster exhibitions and instead we should be critiquing the political infrastructure of such institutions like 'Documenta' and the various biennials that we need to critique and look at as a structure because ultimately it's a limiting structure but it's a structure that doesn't offer any potentiality for differentiation.

SP: Yes and I think that one thing that John Miller pointed out too that was really important is that there's a reason why these structures now want to include, I mean it really comes into this

idea, the difference between that he points out between Hans Haacke's work and Fred Wilson's work, the difference in time between 1972 and 1991 when suddenly, for good perhaps, museums and institutions like 'Documenta', people who were curating these situations saw ok there's a lot of stories out there that aren't being told and as institutional structures we want to include them, we want to tell them because we are official culture and if official culture doesn't include them then they do end up being lost perhaps. But then I think that there is a question of well what happens to those practices when they do become incorporated into official culture in that way and for instance the idea of including an Inuit practice in 'Documenta' how does that make people who don't have any relationship to Inuit culture have never travelled to the North Western territory, who don't know where this practice is coming from. Now does everyone think that they know it because they saw it in 'Documenta' and I think a lot of people think they do know that practice and also the thing that's hugely dangerous about it is that people end up going to 'Documenta', seeing a regional practice, thinking that they know it and then repeating it and also thinking that that is one thing, that now Inuit culture is one thing and it comes down to a subordination or something that we can say that that one regional thing is just one thing whereas we would never say that about ourselves, we would never say yeah British artists are one thing, there's the thing called like British Art and it's just, I mean everyone here recognises that that's completely problematic so I guess in some ways I would disagree with John Miller even though I loved his writing. I think that to accept these are structures I think is somewhat dangerous because I'm really interested in recognising what is specific about regions and about what it means to be an artist participating in a particular place and not even what those differences are but just kind of how, what bureaucracies you have to deal with, what institutions you have to deal with, I mean dealing with institutions in Dublin is really different from dealing with institutions in New York and I think that's why I was dubbed a curator when I moved to Dublin, not to

make a pun there because in some ways it's a much more open place, it's a place that doesn't pigeonhole people and so it looks like curating so let's call it that and I think that that is healthy there whilst in another context that might not be good. Those distinctions are important.

PON: In an interview Ute Meta Bauer responded to being criticised for the over inclusion of too many works in 'Documenta XI' by offering the defence that 'Documenta' is about canons so the more people who would be recognised as being on the margins of that canon, the more that should be included in 'Documenta' historically that has an impact, that would be her defence of the over exposure of very long documentaries etc. Do you think that that's enough of a justification?

SP: I think it's good that she recognised yes that there is that kind of relationship to an official canon or official culture that comes out of these shows. But in terms of what we were talking about before, in terms of what's remembered and what's repressed and how that stuff resurfaces and repeats without us maybe even knowing it, and will we remember that the Inuit videos were done by a group of two or three Inuits and Inuit culture is huge and there's a lot of different people who have really different ideas and really different lives and really different relationships to technology and their surroundings and so will we remember that even, that we'll talk about Inuits but then we'll name Thomas Hirschhorn and I don't know the names of the Inuit people who were involved with that project, and so I think that is a really good example of how the claim around including regional practices in these shows and I think is really hugely problematic on a certain level because it assumes that there is a canon and it assumes that that canon somehow is something that is fixed and is made through these kind of progressive links and these progressive inclusions and that things don't fall out and things aren't forgotten and repressed and that, and it also goes back to like a very feminist question, do I want to be in your canon, who asked me to be there.

That is a question that I would pose to her would be 'whose canon?'

PON: The term Seth Siegelaub used during the late 1960s for the changing role or expanding role of the curator was 'demystification'. Do you think that demystification is still a term that needs to be continually examined in relation to curatorial practice?

SP: I don't know, I think a little mystique can go a long way. I feel cautioned about that because I think that it comes back to that sort of double talk when people are like I'm being really straight forward now, is that a signal for like ok what are you actually not telling me or not saying and so, but I think that again in terms of a traditional practice it's probably good to demystify the role of the curator just on the level of there is someone making selections, there is someone whose idiosyncratic personal educational perspective, cultural perspective is coming into play here and that there's prejudices and that there's discrepancies and I think that, I mean in some ways it goes to something I think is really important that Georgio Agamben is presenting now and why so many people in the art world are really picking up on what he's saying is that these power structures are actually incredibly ambivalent and incredibly imprecise in terms of the decisions that come about and perhaps in demystifying the role of the curator that there is a role there and we're going to expose what it is but that what's perhaps more unsettling in that demystification is all those kind of ambivalences that come out, that it's actually ambivalent to choose an Inuit project over another project and of course not everything can be there, not everything can be represented but it's really important to demystify the role of the curator in that way and to come out and say that. I think the people want things to be kind of like, want everything to be justified and want everything to be kind of like closed and neat and clean and in some ways I really appreciate moments where curators say very unabashedly yes I really, I found

this kind of interesting and I'm not really sure why and perhaps that's why it's here and I'm not quite sure what it means yet and to be not be afraid of that.

PON: Do you think that the term 'performative' is a useful term in order to make visible the activities of a curator? It was used by Maria Lind et al at the Kunstverein Munich.

SP: Yes I mean I think the term performative does show that there is kind of something that's being, there's an extrovert there, there's something that's being put out but another word that goes with the idea of performative would be the word of rehearsing or experimenting and I think that something, I mean something that I really appreciate about Maria Lind's performative practice is that she does, I mean as a performance it doesn't necessarily seem like she knows what's going to, I mean it's interesting to think of that metaphor because I think a lot is improvised and a lot is in rehearsal and then she lets herself do things again and so there's not this idea of like there's this show and it's closed and then this show and that's done and sealed which is I think maybe a more interesting way to think about these larger biennials too and instead to think of something like Istanbul in 2003 and how that connects to the one that's about to happen this year and where those ambivalences are and what's being performed through those situations. I think one thing that Maria Lind does that's really nice in terms of that performativity is that things happen more than once, perhaps like a performance, she'll work with someone, she'll work with the same artist over again and she'll kind of organise similar situations that, and allow one situation to feed into the next which I think is interesting, I like that model.

PON: And do you think that post-graduate training courses have had an impact on how we perceive the contemporary curator?

SP: Yes. Why yes, like capital letters here. I used to have a really glib attitude towards curatorial MAs and what I found

myself saying in conversations and repeating conversations was that this is just about professionalising something and I should differentiate here between someone who is studying fourteenth century Dutch art, I felt that it made sense to do a serious art history degree and then become a curator wherever in relation to that degree and then there is the kind of contemporary art curatorial MA like at Goldsmiths and Bard and stuff, I felt in New York was sort of producing a group of professionals who were then going to be in charge and I questioned that authority I really did, not necessarily directly in relation to people who I knew who had gone through the courses who I liked and worked with and stuff but so what sort of divisions within the art world it was setting up, and was this now saying that there's a professional curator and those are the people who are in charge of putting shows together and so was it going to kind of relinquish any of that kind of, the stuff that we were talking about before in relation to how artists were participating in these structures - was it just going to make it so that then there's these professional artists who also have their MAs and that it was just going to make everything really neat and tidy and institutional. I think my perspective on that has changed actually in the last seven years in that, 7-10 years because I think that from what I can tell those courses do, they're less about training people about the professional, the kind of profession of curating and they're more about recognising, really recognising the research around curating as something that's quite viable and quite, that's really contributing, really contributing to culture and I think that it is really contributing to culture. But it's a hard question for me.

PON: On another level with the exception of maybe the Goldsmiths course which is self directed study where each of the students realise their own personal projects, Le Magasin and De Appel and RCA etc., all end up with a collective group of art exhibition of works at the end of it. So it would seem to me that the default button is 'the exhibition', is the final product for curators and

ultimately that's kind of representing a particular notion of what a curator does.

SP: Yes and I think that's a really good point, like are these programmes and are these MAs as opposed to like opening up with that idea is, this was my initial concern in the mid 90s when all of these programmes were opening up everywhere and everyone I knew who had done an art history degree was not going to do an MA in curating and we have to ask is the role of these courses to institutionalise people, to kind of show them how to work within the Robert Smithson notion of the cultural confines of the exhibition and one thing that I got out of the Whitney Programme just going back to that, because it's curators, writers, there's curators, critics, and artists working together is that in that situation I think it was left about the end result being this kind of institutionalised, and lately I've become really uncomfortable with the term role and the term function because I think that everyone is trying to define everyone else's function and it's more about like trying to figure out where you fit in relation to someone else's role and I guess just speaking from my own experience I feel like from working with people, that's how you learn how to put together an exhibition and in some ways putting together an exhibition is like the easy-peasy part of these negotiations and so why someone would need like two years and an MA in order to learn that is a little bit, I mean I know that I'm being very reductive here but it's a little beyond me and isn't it more about, from my perspective isn't it more about learning about getting into cultural theory, getting into kind of, seeing what other practices are out there, figuring our your relationship to them, reading people, like looking at everything from the writings that you refer to in relation to John Miller, to what an artist has to say about this stuff to what critics have to say and figuring out your relationship to the world in that way rather than well my role as a curator is to raise the money for the show and then to select the works and then to find a space and then to put it in the exhibition and to do…

PON: Do you think curating is a form of artistic practice?

SP: No, I don't think so, and that's basically just because I don't, I haven't met any curators who say that but if they did then maybe I'd be like yes ok. I mean I think…

PON: If it's no longer useful to define the role of the curator for want of a better term or if it's not useful to fix what that activity is and if it is a discipline and if there are particular individual practitioners from Carlos Basualdo to Hans Ulrich Obrist to Maria Lind to Nicholas Serota who were all curators whose practice is extraordinarily different from one another, all of which involves the production and participation of an individual within a creative process that happens to end up as an art exhibition or publication or event, that perhaps their role can be an artistic one depending on what they wish to articulate within the final product?

SP: Well I think that yes in some ways you could say that there's things that they have in common like that you could trace if you actually broke down what people are doing and how they're thinking, that there's definitely things that, I don't want to say overlap, that just are the same, they're just the same things, and both sides of the column would have the same things in them for quite a way down and then, and so then why say that it's not, why say do you think there's, that curating is an artistic practice, it's more like well that there's just, that there's artists and curators who are doing a lot of the same stuff and using a lot of the same methods and so I think a more important question is what changes in our relation to those practices when they're called curatorial or when they're called artistic, does it change like how we think about them, does it change our critical relationship with them, our criticality within them, how do those, if I think of Maria Lind as an artist does it change what I think about what she does, does it change my relationship to it. I think that's what happens every time we define something or try and make these

differentiations, we're actually less trying to pinpoint what's going on out there and we're more trying to figure out our relationship to it, I think that's just because we're human beings and that's how we relate to each other is to kind of figure out, I mean it goes back to the inclusion of the Inuit work, it's less about the Inuit work and it's more kind of like our relationship to it and how we perceive that relationship and so on.

PON: The 'Metropolitan Complex' newspaper could quite easily be conceived as an artwork and it could quite easily be conceived as a curatorial project but I'm not sure whether it makes a difference somehow because it's obviously not mediated in a way that would suggest that it is either or claim it as either.

SP: It depends on what the artwork is in that situation because there's an object, it's multiple, it's free, it's dispersive and so it functions very differently from an artwork in that way but yes it was created, it was conceived of, it had a certain criticality to it in terms of like obviously the way it's designed and all of those things kind of like implicated perhaps as an artwork. I am not sure of it as a curatorial piece…

PON: You are providing a structure, which is one thing that all curators do and whether the structure happens to be the exhibition or whether the structure happens to be a newspaper inviting people into it and then there's an outcome based on that structure so it's actually in some ways, it comes from a kind of a history of what Irene Calderoni calls 'Creative Shows' which are when the actual outcome or the production of the thing/response to a particular structure that's been set up like the 'January' or 'March' show by Siegelaub, which is different to selecting works in order for them to fit into a particular theme or concept.

SP: It's hard because in some ways I'm reading what you just said as almost like it's a metaphor for curatorial practice which, and so then how far does the metaphor go and how useful it is but I

think that I don't feel like it's a curated space in that way, maybe in the way that I think of an exhibition or project or even a book that might be seen as a curatorial space or a curated space because, and so yes in that way I think it's less about fluctuating between an artwork and a curated project and more, again it's like somewhere, it's something else, somewhere else, I mean in some ways it's just a publication, it's really just a publication that's found on the outskirts or within exhibitions and in that way it's probably got a lot more in common with like the ticket or some free periodical that shows up every now and then.

PON: Except for that it's predominantly distributed within an arts context?

SP: Yes it is but it's not promoting in the same way, it's not promoting city culture in that way but maybe it is actually, maybe it kind of is.

PON: Thanks.

END OF TAPE


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ANDREW RENTON

London, 25-10-04

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator and what was your first project as a curator?

ANDREW RENTON: It was definitely an accident and there was no intention of it at all. I was a writer and I have a PhD in Literature and Philosophy and I was interested in how we thought about art but it never occurred to me at that point to do anything with it. I'd always been obsessed with looking at art and I actually even made art but not in any kind of trained way. And I was writing about it and someone asked me to curate a show and it didn't seem particularly strange at the time because I don't think one really thought about it being beyond the art that one was thinking about. I mean you didn't think about curating as a discipline as such, you thought about getting works that you were interested in out there. So the first show I curated was for an art fair that took place in I think Olympia in 1990 or 1991 and it was a look at new young artists in London and I just curated a little group show in that art fair. Art fairs have come a long way since then in terms of what the add on or the bolt ons that you need for art fairs, but at the time it was the only kind of non commercial element and it was kind of interesting, it was a very naïve stab at curating and there were some artists who were kind of you know, there were some very interesting things that happened there but I think I learnt from that moment almost what I was doing wrong in terms of curatorial intervention, it looked elegant but I realised that wasn't the only thing. And so the first real show I curated was a show in 1991 called 'Show Hide Show' and that was at Anderson O'Dea gallery, a commercial gallery in Portobello Road and those of us with long enough memories will remember that Portobello Road was the Hoxton of its day, hard to imagine now but it was really the case and there were loads of galleries in Portobello Road and Pru O'Dea had the foresight to sort of say well there's something going on why don't you put a show together. And I curated a show there of the new generation of artists that I was seeing and there was, who was in there, Alex Hartley, Jake Chapman who was at that point only working on his own, he'd just come out of college, wasn't working with Dinos, Sam Taylor Wood, again it was like her first show, Abigail Lane and, that was about it. It was that kind of small show and it was interesting because you realised from the show that there was kind of an energy going on and artists had their own kind of contexts and so it grew from there so it was a very interesting

way to start and if you look back at it none of those people really make the same kind of work anymore but that was also interesting, that this was a moment where they were just trying to figure it out. And I realised then that what you did as a curator and I think you spend most of your time sort of flitting around, you're problem solving and all of us are relatively inexperienced and just trying to get something to vaguely resemble something that we'd seen somewhere else. But I must say I'm incredibly nostalgic for that show, it worked on its own terms, was it a sophisticated piece of curating, no, absolutely not, I don't think I really started to think about what curating could be until after that.

PON: Would you have defined your role within that project as one of curation?

AR: That's what it says on the piece of paper. At that point being the curator was the guy who bought the pizza at night, you're trying to get the thing on the wall, someone has to send out for pizza and it's the curator as a rule. Absolutely it was curated and to do with picking up on a sensibility that was going around, all the traditional things, there's a little catalogue, you write in there saying it was about selection and I became increasingly more concerned that curating shouldn't be just about my taste and about my power to select, so those are the issues that sort of come up later on when you develop other curatorial strategies but at the time it was absolutely about my taste. What was great about growing up with that generation of artists is that they were making the kind of art that I really liked, felt at one with it, there was no kind of discrepancy between what they were doing and the way I was thinking. In a funny kind of way all of their work was relatively academic at that point in terms of thinking through conceptual models and that suited me at that time because I came from this kind of non practitioner background which has always been the position I've taken and I've always felt very strongly that there are other people who have a studio practice I don't, there are other people who have even an art history degree I don't, so I was always kind of interested in my position in relation to that. There are other people who understand art I don't.

PON: What dominant forms of curatorial practice do you see have

developed since then, the early 1990s?

AR: I think the core of it is the possibility of collaboration, the openness of projects and the sort of decentring of any kind of authoritative position, whether it's the artist or whether it's the curator. I do remember doing a show with Douglas Gordon in 1993 and I remember him explaining to someone what he did as an artist, and he sort of was really trying very hard to explain that actually the artist didn't necessarily need to be in the centre of things, but there was a possibility that they could be an agent for provocation into other things. And so I kind of realised that that was what I was more interested in. We're sitting here in the curating space at Goldsmiths and thinking about what we think about curating around this table all the time and the terms that come up all the time are things like dialogue, collaboration and so on and I think that in the '90s that was a reality because the notion of curating became visible for the first time, it wasn't that things weren't curated prior to that, it was that things weren't stated as such, there was a kind of invisible curatorial hand delivered from on high and suddenly you see the curator as a participant and that glowering continues, it's not just the artist-curator, curator-artist, that's fine but what it's really about is this possibility that curating which does exist in every show is defined as an activity. Its like when in the '80s we started talking about things as designer, things were always designed, it's just that after a while we became rather conscious of that act and we were interested in that as part of it and so I think the curator, the curatorial element is there. So those bits I think are the things that I think I saw and I think I was interested in, and it wasn't just about a process of selection but it was about processes full stop. The process of election implied that once that was done all you needed to do was rearrange the furniture and frankly in the white cube. We know that probably everything is equivalent in that sense so it all looks great and you realise that really soon because you're busy patting yourself on the back, oh my show it's so chic and actually the reality is that for it to have a kind of lasting resonance you're actually trying to set out relationships and as you curate more you realise that actually some of those relationships literally between artists and yourself and whatever, those are all an ongoing dialogue and they can manifest themselves in a variety of ways, I hadn't realised that was possible.

PON: So you're kind of talking about a shift away from the Harald Szeemannian model of curator as author through to the idea of curator as the producer of structures, strategies?

AR: I think so, I think so. I always love those things that had gaps in there for openness you know. I always kind of think of the curator as someone who forces a space open for things to happen, the metaphor I always give and I've given it before so apologies if you've heard it, and it is the hotel lift. I mean you've got to fight to keep the elevator door open, that is the curatorial space and it's always wanting to close itself down and make a neat solution and I think that openness is really hard to achieve and there are many things that mitigate against you ranging from institutional pressure to economic pressure you know, real basic stuff. The irony is in this room and it's incredible irony, we've got these old crates that come from the Tate that used to house these really precious artworks. In the old days when you curated a show you crated up your works, you put them on the scales, you weighed them up and said ok that's what my freight costs, that's what my insurance costs but what no one can account for is human cost and to force the space open in which artists can do stuff is very costly on an emotional level as much as an economic level.

PON: I remember reading that you said as a curator I've always had a problem with objects, which I think is in that same piece where you use the analogy of the hotel lift.

AR: Yes I think I gave all my good stories away. I've always had a problem with objects. Well I think I was always very interested in the structures, having a problem with the objects is exactly why I think I'm a curator and it comes from a variety of sources and the difficulty in understanding the traditional history of art because I'm absolutely sure that I came to art from modernism and worked backwards. I never really understood religious art, which was kind of the cornerstone of Western culture, particularly as a Jew who was trying to figure out what is this thing about prohibition of images or certainly graven images of three dimensional things you know, and I also came at things from the level of ideas so the shock to me as a curator, and the thing that continues to define me as a curator is the encounter with objects.

Yet I have difficulty with objects but I have difficulties with relationships, it doesn't mean I don't get into them and on the contrary you just keep diving in. But one of the solutions to that difficulty was to find structures that somehow would not involve me over-imposing upon those objects and that was what I was very concerned for, that curatorially it seemed important that it was not about me and if you look at those sculptures, what is that thing that people do in the museum where they twist the sculpture so it's at a sort of angle that's supposedly about giving more than one perception or one whatever, and I just sort of wish that museums would be a bit more straight about it and just sort of put everything in a 90 degree angle and just then say well look do the work and go round it. But I was very resistant to that stylised twist, the jaunty angle of the object because I didn't think that was a very true reading of the object, I think for me it was always difficult but it was nevertheless always physical, to say I had always a problem with objects doesn't mean that I wanted to remove objects from the project. I always found that encounter incredibly difficult, incredibly challenging. The object always resisted me, those were the objects I was interested in, that I didn't want the ones that I could interpret or were easy.

PON: Are there past curatorial models, exhibitions or historical precedents or precursors that have been an influence on your practice as a curator?

AR: I knew you'd ask that and I thought I'd really have to kind of mug up on some really historical precedents. The answer on a simple level is actually no but I don't want that to sound arrogant, I think it's also to do with the fact that I sort of come from this in a kind of amateurish way, I look back to think about things and I could say to you 'When Attitudes Become Form', but I didn't see it you know and so on. Where the instinct for making exhibitions came from I think was much more clearly from a personal encounter with objects in museums than it ever was from a curated show. I can't think of a curated show that really, well I can, I mean I can think of things that influenced me on a kind of fashionable level, I kind of think about that 'New Spirit in Painting' show where we all started wearing hot pants again and it really changed our perception of shows but as a curated show I don't think it was particularly earth shattering, I think in a funny

kind of way a lot of those shows in their comprehensive nature do very well in catalogues. The things that for me worked were experiences that I had as a teenager where I would see works of art in situ and for me that was what it was all about and everything I've ever learnt in art, in historical terms from that point was wrong, it wasn't just another way of thinking, it was wrong, that art history was taught without the space around the work, without the frame round the painting and that seemed bizarre. I just didn't get it and when I used to go and look at art I used to look at it in situ and I did realise and one of these kind of revelations to me was I remember sneaking out from school when I was about 14 years old to go and see a Giacometti exhibition that the Arts Council had organised in Manchester and one of the 'Walking Men', I think *Walking Man Number Two*, I think it's the one that the Tate owns was in the gallery and I just thought what a fantastic sculpture, didn't think about it anymore, I remember writing about it for the school newspaper but then like two years later I saw it at the Tate and I'd been to see this, not particularly the sculpture but I'd been to see this show many times, I used to sneak out every lunch time and look at it time and time again because it obsessed me or I was obsessed with it and the shock to see it back home as it were and how different it looked, it was an absolute shock and an incredible revelation and that was what I was interested in, that the context changes the relationship you have to that work of art. The other thing that was amazingly reassuring about that was that there were things that you could rely upon in the world that would give you some kind of pleasure, reassurance, old fashioned stuff like that, in the same way that you have your favourite CD or whatever but in the same way that artworks could be relied upon to generate something but it was the context that shocked me beyond imagining, that they'd changed the way you thought about that work and that the work had a proactive presence, it did something to you as much as you do to it. And it was kind of weird because these discoveries sort of came whilst I was looking at theoretical modes and actually the idea that you could actually, that this was actually very physical. In a similar way I have to say I did find myself by accident at the 'Venice Biennale' when I was a teenager and I think what blew me away was the scale and the possibilities and range and the sheer number of things that were there that I couldn't assimilate.

PON: Are there particular historical curators or models that you're perhaps looking at now or do you see kind of historical research as the particular aspects?

AR: I mean I've started doing some homework on Walberg now in terms of, because I don't think we can understand the radicality of what he was doing. I actually sort of disapprove of what he was doing and this idea of sort of making photographs of works of art and then sort of posting them up and juxtaposing, I don't mind the juxtapositions from one era to another, that's what's kind of radical about it, I sort of, I'm troubled by the encounter with the work of art at the level of reproduction and I'll take no prisoners when it comes to Sister Wendy but somehow Walberg did something really profound in terms of breaking out the art historical model and actually he sort of collapsed it and did something else that was extremely interesting and I kind of see that as so, I mean it's been picked up in so many ways inadvertently, there are so many people who are operating like that, I think it's extremely interesting and we could not possibly understand how subversive that was. So I forgive him the kind of cardinal sin of not dealing with the artwork but actually dealing with its image, simply because he did something that I so desperately disapprove of, this art historical burden of art history and he kind of exploded that and I think that was really fascinating but he wouldn't have thought of himself as a curator.

PON: In *The Power of Display*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlighted what she calls the art historical 'amnesia' towards the curatorial past and in particular the laboratory between the 1920s-50s and the role played by people like Alexander Dorner and Frederick Kiesler and Lilly Reich etc., and there is an argument to suggest that perhaps this amnesia is somehow responsible for the intensification over the last say 15-20 years of the rise of the curator, the idea of the curator as being kind of the creative component within the exhibition making when in fact historically speaking it may have began in the 20s, 30s and 40s.

AR: I mean that book is really amazing just simply for the photographs that are in it and I can see that it looks like somewhere like Vyner Street. We've got two modes of operating these days, one is kind of slick and one is grunge and grunge is in itself a kind of stylistic

mode and I kind of miss the kind of unselfconsciousness of that, some of those, even the MOMA installations with curtains and things.

PON: It's interesting that even in the art fairs such as 'Frieze' now some galleries are actually trying to do that grunge.

AR: Yes absolutely, it's very interesting that that came up here and actually it's alienating, it was interesting talking to the students about that today, none of them trusted for example the Maccarone stand, I thought it was kind of interesting, they didn't buy it. 'Amnesia' is a kind of key thing in that we do not have a documented history of the curatorial intervention, it's just not there and it takes people like you to put that back into a historical context because frankly we didn't learn it, we learnt the works and look at those Constructivist installations, you can't separate Malevich's black square from where it was, why was it high in the corner like that and that rather kind of crumby little room etc., why was it up there, well of course it was up there for very specific referential reason and I don't know whether it's amnesia, I just think it slipped out because it just wasn't on the radar because again the curator was invisible for political reasons, to show your visibility at that point would be to reveal the power structure that was going on, not at that point, now it's possible to do that but to show your hand like that would be to reveal the manipulation that goes on in the museum and the manipulation that goes on in the museum is as specific as having white footprints on the ground directing you from A to B.

PON: Do you think there are current curatorial projects or initiatives that are perhaps breaking new ground?

AR: Yes and no, I just think we're more relaxed about it, I don't think anyone's particularly worried. I think the more clever they get, and I notice it here in terms of young curators, the more convoluted the curatorial idea the less place there is for the artist. On the other hand there's kind of models of absolute simplicity that just kind of just keep running and things like Hans Ulrich Obrist's 'Do It', it's just so straight forward but it's not original in a sense because it's just literally picking up on what was around him and that's what's so brilliant about him. But actually I don't think of him as a kind of

major conceptual curator I think of him as a really hard working person who sees everything and as a consequence is trying to find a way of accommodating everything, I think that's what it's about.

PON: I would see his curatorial practice as one of a 'gatherer' more than a producer or mediator of a particular narrative.

AR: I think you're absolutely right and he's worked very hard not to sort of over-impose on that and sometimes it's a mess and sometimes it's extremely effective. But there are models like that or there are examples like that and one of the other difficulties that we're always negotiating here is the possibility of a new curatorial instinct or whatever, actually it's always about the new one or the current one whatever you know. One of the things we try not to do here is have a fixed reading list, what we'll do is we're kind of, constantly that goes into our current reading because that's what people are thinking about at this moment. Curating I don't think should be about precedents and avant-garde revisions of the precedent, it's not terribly interesting. What's interesting I think is that kind of sort of gradually sort of shifting relationship between the artist and the curator and that's always moving on here and there, that's always subject to change.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative consultant within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making, how do you see the role of the curator and at what level of artistic production do you see your practice being involved in the process of art making?

AR: Yes I mean you're always, the more visible the curatorial intervention the more you're accused of appropriating the space of the artist. I don't see myself as an artist at all but I see myself as very much a kind of collaborator. There are different ways of participating within the frame of the exhibition and sometimes you're invited to curate a show and you operate on one level and sometimes you find yourself almost by default in the show in some way. I've been in shows where I've sort of operated in what I perceived as a curatorial manner where I've been listed as one of the participants in the show not as a curator and I'm interested in that if a little troubled by

that and equally my name has been on curatorial projects and I've done exhibitions where my name is very invisible. I mean a good case in point would be the difference between two different types of one-person show where you could act as a curator who's sort of historicising someone's output on one level and another kind which is absolutely a collaboration and I've done both and that kind of collaborative bit is really interesting to me and those are moments where the artist doesn't seem to have any issue in terms of what you call yourself, it's a kind of ritualised thing that the curator is the person who does one kind of thing but actually in terms of what the output is, who is achieving the output, that's much more ambiguous. I used to think that what you did is you push it to the next level and what I think now is that you have to operate on many different modes, horses for courses, sometimes it's appropriate to operate in biennial mode and sometimes it's appropriate to operate in some other kind of collaborative mode. I don't think one overrides the other, I don't think it's progressive, what I think is that curatorial language operates in parallel with artistic production in the same way that critical discourse used to operate in parallel with art production but curatorial language is a kind of an animated version of that and they grow and move together and they move in different ways into different areas. And I think in a funny kind of way we've sort of reached a bit of a crisis with it and I think sort of 'Utopia Station' might be the kind of stumbling block where again you can't see the wood for the trees but it is about what it was about, but equally it is also the moment of coming of age because the discourse that's around that was not centred on a single work of art it was centred on the curatorial intervention.

PON: At the same time most of the artists were very happy to participate within that structure which demands the question, what kind of work is actually being mediating as well as what is the specific curatorial work?

AR: The specific types of work, would those artists be happy to be only represented in that way, I'm absolutely certain not but I think there's a sophistication in terms of what artists think about where they can be today and that's an extremely valid place for them to be, it's part of the discourse and artists are increasingly aware that that's how their work is going to be validated.

PON: The term 'performative curating' was used by the Kunstverein Munich to describe a curatorial practice associated with certain types of contemporary art projects where the curatorial strategy is made more apparent. Do you think performativity is a useful tool in the production of critical forms of curating?

AR: Yes I mean I think that's very much what we do, I mean I am not sure whether I would call it performative or whether I would see it in other terms of, but one of the things that I was increasingly interested in and it's something to do with the fact that I came to curating from being a critic, was a real interest in operating critically within the show not from the outside in but the inside out and that meant that you had to be responsive to the show not from installation until the point of private view, but for the duration of the show and how that could evolve and how that could change and how you could anticipate responses or not even how you could respond to responses and to the show. I think Maria Lind's notion of the performative is great because I think it clarifies the flux of the curatorial obligation, that it is never resolved. You could argue that performative is also that kind of last minute thing which is really about arbitrary decisions so all the thinking in the world and all the theorising in the world at the end of the day you've got the wretched work that you've got to get on the wall somehow and little bit higher little bit lower, that's not theory or anything that's just kind of pragmatic and so on. And there is the sense that certain historical decisions are made standing on one leg like that, what I think the term is really useful for is to acknowledge that the job of the curator is not over the day the show opens. What he or she does then I don't know, maybe different things but it's absolutely, that one I kind of figured out earlier on, I didn't know how to do anything about it but it just occurred to me there was something wrong with this picture that you left after the private view.

PON: I mean there's one argument against this thesis about performativity and curation is that it produces a higher level of visibility for the performer or for the speaker whilst the actual act always ends because the act always ends up being the production of the

physical manifestation of that performance.

AR: Yes and I think then what you have to do is you just have to know your place and therefore the balancing act is the extent of that abuse of power. I think that's about discretion, it's not a question of the type of action that you're involved in, there's probably a degree of action that you're involved in so I don't think because you're concerned to over assert your position that you stop acting in that way, I think that the key thing is the question of dialogue. I always think it's sort of like how long can you keep the conversation rolling with an artist and for me it's about decades in an ideal world. But also how long can you keep the dialogue rolling without you committing the cardinal sin of curating which is to say to the artist 'you know what you should do', it's not my job to say that, it's my job to think it and it's my job to fantasise about what, but if I say to an artist you know what you should do and I tell them, I've automatically closed down a thousand and one options.

PON: A key word used by Seth Siegelaub to clarify the changing role of the curator in the late 60s was the word 'demystification', how relevant do you think this term is in evaluating contemporary curatorial practice?

AR: You'd think not a lot. I kind of think it's like the basic nuts and bolts. I am quite a strong believer that part of the job of curating is to make the show self explanatory and people ask what would that be and I would say that what you have is not a catalogue that explained your work but actually the works explained each other and then you've really got an integrated exhibition. What demystification doesn't quite allow for is notions of complexity - and we live in an age where artworks do not conform to a single genre and are, by their inherent nature, complex - and that is interesting and my take is different from your take. So I'm quite interested in demystifying the process of experiencing art, but I'm interested in simultaneously retaining the possibility of complexity within that and there are very simple models that you can do that with, really darn simple models that can do that. In my mind I've done a series of exhibitions of archives that were just very simply, where the archive is the simplest of models.

PON: For example like your 'Browser' project?

AR: 'Browser' in particular yes because we had a couple of versions of 'Browser' and what 'Browser' does is, it's so simple and that is a way of enabling an incredible complexity from something that every single person who walks through the door knows what's going on, it's so straightforward and frankly people who used to go to 'Browser' weren't necessarily art people or whatever, the whole idea was to make it super user friendly and demystify what an artwork could be and on that level as well I mean it's about hanging works of art.

PON: Do you think a curated exhibition can be a work of art in itself?

AR: Yes or something that looked like a curated exhibition might be a work of art or vice versa, I mean I think yes I suppose so.

PON: Are there examples of that which you can think of?

AR: The interesting thing is there's this sort of mimesis game going on, I'm thinking about things like the shows, like the one that Lucy Lippard curated and I can never remember what the number is because the number changed depending on the city according to the population of the city and you know the one I mean, and of course it looks like a work of conceptual art and it sort of is but it is actually ultimately a work that absorbs various conceptual projects and so on. No I mean I don't have a problem in that sense but in a funny kind of way that, for example with 'Browser', people said he just sort of made a thing that looks like a lot, your precursors are actually artworks rather than curatorial models and we're very conscious of that and we're very self conscious of that.

PON: Do you think of curating as a form of artistic practice or production?

AR: I've got to give a clever answer right.

PON: Well I suppose simply the question is do you think of curating as artistic, curating in practice?

AR: I think it's practice driven and practice I understand in physical terms. So does that make it artistic, possibly. Do I think of myself as an artist? No, but then should I worry about that, no, I'm too old but should it, there's no question, it's a creative process. I've clung to the distinction between the curator and the artist because it suited my purpose in the projects that I've curated, it's that simple… I think that's probably a fictional division.

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is and how would you describe a good curated exhibition? Do we have the vocabulary to decide a bad or good curated exhibition?

AR: Do we have a good vocabulary? This is something again that concerns us a lot here at Goldsmiths, I'm very aware that the critical vocabulary does not really exist yet to address curatorial practice but we all know what we think of as a successful show on its own terms and we can all feel it, the strange thing is we've struggled to articulate it, we struggle to articulate it more than we struggle to do it because very often you can sense why something is working but you can't really put it into words. So I think you're at the heart at, one of the problems around curating is that you don't want to slip into art historical mode, you don't really want to slip into a kind of visual culture mode, I think curating is something very specific, I could almost argue going back to your previous question that curating is a genre of production but I almost don't want to make too much claim for curators but I think it's in that area although the terminology is difficult to define. I'm kind of intrigued that we're very obsessed with this idea of curating now and strangely enough the English language doesn't really want to admit that it's a word and it's a suitably evasive word in English in a way that it's not in German for example it is very clear in what that person does. So in terms of what we think curating could be, even the term is resistant and we're using it as a verb, it shouldn't be, so I'm aware that the critical discourse surrounding curating is incredibly limited that's why I'm interested and I think we're at that point in history where we're going to be able to start to articulate it soon enough but it's been very tricky to describe it and frankly you can do it by citing precedents and it's very interesting because your pieces in *Art Monthly* are very much about

whether or not you need to rely on history to develop a critical discourse around curating, I mean that's my interpretation of those two pieces.

PON: There's also about kind of isolating it as a specific field of cultural activity, which is in its own right different from other activities whilst related and reliant on them.

AR: Which is tricky but there's a yes and a no to that.

PON: Has being involved with the curators of 'Manifesta 1' altered the way in which you thought about your curatorial practice?

AR: I desperately disapproved of biennials when I was invited to curate.

PON: I remember you saying it's 'the worst idea in the world'.

AR: Yes and in a funny kind of way I still do, I still go to them, still enjoy bits of them. 'Manifesta 1' was a place to test out many ideas simultaneously, some worked, some didn't. It was the first one and it was the hardest because I'm guessing we didn't know what we should be doing and what we could do. Ideas of dialogue, we're obsessed with that, ideas of collaboration, we're really obsessed with. The team was Cataleen Niru from Budapest, Victor Massiano, Rosa Martinez and Hans Ulrich Obrist and I'm convinced that what they did was they looked at a map of Europe and they go ok Moscow's over there, we need someone from this side and they pick me, they need someone vaguely North somewhere in the middle of, you know so it was very strategic I think on the organisers' part and that was fascinating. First of all I discovered that it was impossible, it was much harder to work as a curator in collaborative mode, particularly when you've got this obligation to something bigger than you and I kind of think in terms of the human obligations of a large scale project. I don't think of it as a kind of great turning point in terms of how I think about exhibitions because I think that biennials, by their very scale, involve so much in the way of compromise and pragmatism, nothing wrong with that, the pragmatic solutions are very often the best ones and so on but there isn't much time for theory when there's 300 artists trying

to get their work involved in a matter of hours.

PON: Which of your projects do you think has been most significant in expanding the parameters of the role of the contemporary art curator? If one of them were to enter the history of curating, which one would you like?

AR: I don't know, I suppose you always kind of think about them in terms of the most recent one as the most satisfying. I think some with fewest compromises. 'Walter Benjamin's Briefcase' was 1993 and we had budget, we had scale, very strategically worked with a smaller number of artists that they could make really major projects and I really feel that was one that produced an incredibly satisfying experience. And then the last show that I did that I'm most interested in, I did in Israel with Naral Jubilin called 'Schumakon' and it's a one person show, it was incredibly difficult to make an exhibition in Israel in a kind of war zone, bombs going off, the politics or whether or not one should be making a show there and we made exactly the opposite of every kind of large scale show that we could, wasn't a biennial, we took the museum, decided between us to make a kind of skeletal version of what the show could have been and an exhibition that was hardly there and it was an exhibition that had for me as a curator the possibility of an internal critique and it needed to have that because of the political obligations of the situations. What was it to be making an exhibition in Jerusalem at the time of war between two identities? Whether it's the Israelis and the Palestinians and working with Naral it was an incredibly trusting relationship and the result of something that literally could not, it was more than site specific, it was something that literally grew out of the period of the show taking place which involved me actually in an ongoing dialogue with the artist and her responding to the situations in that, I'll give you a catalogue. And that of course the scale of it was little but for me it meant ah that's what a curator can do, a curator can actually operate on a serious ethical level, I think that was a thing I hadn't taken on board, talk about ethics, we talk about our obligation and then I realised this was on line and everything was at stake right down to that initial thing which was should I be here at all, to what are the implications of the display here of what you say to the point of a private view where you know, 500 people gathering in a public space in Jerusalem was a very

dangerous and political act. So simple things take on another kind of resonance. It's still for the artist and myself an incredibly problematic show, we still, we don't quite know what to do with it because the whole body of work that came out of it and we kind of wonder whether it could or should ever be seen anywhere else or whether we have to kind of re-think it again.

PON: Because I remember reading that you were thinking of expanding the 'Browser' project to Israel at that time?

AR: Yes, I mean frankly not practical at this point because there's no collaboration between Israel and Palestine, as and when that's feasible then we would and that would be a very useful exercise but in a funny kind of way this kind of show that we made in Jerusalem was almost a kind of mourning for the kind of grand show that we couldn't do and for me more effective because of that and that kind of element that you can somehow be, not in control but taking responsibility, slightly different nuance to it because I'm not particularly interested in taking control but I'm extremely interested in taking responsibility and that's not the same thing as taking credit.

PON: Do you think the post-graduate training courses in curation have affected curatorial practices in the UK and beyond?

AR: I mean basically it seems to be that if you want to be a curator you sort of have to do them now and I'm sort of sad about that because people like me came to it from somewhere else. We work very hard here to choose people from really different backgrounds almost out of nostalgia for that and at the same time we're also very conscious that we should not establish orthodoxy in terms of what we teach. So we do lay down, we state very clearly when we begin every year that we're not trying to give them some rules about how to be a curator but we're giving them a space in which they can learn to be themselves and what their route might be through it. So I was saying to you before, we've cut out a lot of the nuts and bolts of learning to be a curator in favour of something more self determined and so on. I'm guessing that the way that the world works is that people increasingly if they want to be involved in the art world it gives them a head start to be involved with either our course or perhaps the Royal College or the

Whitney or the Magasin or the De Appel or whatever, these great places and I'd like to think that in the next few years that the critical language the surrounds curating will be homed here, if it can't be then where else will it be done and I think that that's the thing that I have great hope for in terms of this. What I don't want, I mean I would be mortified if we produced a house style and that would be really, we should all give up and go home at that point. I think that's for the museums to do, I think museums do have identifiable ways of working and as soon as you get into the museum that's fine you can go with that particular flow. I think what we should be doing is constantly questioning that. I'm kind of interested in seeing where people end up from here and they end up in very different places and the thing that surprises me is how many of our students go out to real meaningful employment and I think that's a sign that there are roles for the curator to play.

PON: Alongside the development of the critical language around curatorial practice in the 1990s with the development of these courses was an intensification of the professionalisation of curating which is a contradiction in terms, the professionalisation alongside criticality?

AR: I tell you what's interesting because I mean when I came to rethink what this course was, there's two things that became apparent, one is that it's got this rather lumbering and very embarrassing title 'Creative Curating' which I'm guessing was someone's idea of putting it up in contra distinction to the professionalised version of curating that's number one and two, if you were to look at the course outlines and what constituted the MA in the first place, it was rather apologetically a social sciences course, it was like you know, we'd better put some rigour in here because we really don't know what curating is. The interesting thing is that when I took over, the person who was responsible for kind of academic definitions in terms of our department said we really shouldn't worry about that, however six or seven years in, we're much clearer that we don't need to worry about sort of linking it to something much more established, that it is its own discipline. That's what's so exciting about this is that actually it goes back to your original question curating is for sure its own discipline, whether we call it an art form is another matter but it is

its own discipline. We are very conscious and very committed to curating at Goldsmiths being part of visual arts, being part of a studio practice and the culture of our making, we don't belong to the art history department. I think that's quite interesting and I think that's been one of its strengths that you come here as a practitioner in a funny kind of way, whatever that practice might be.

PON: I mean if you look at all the modules, do you look at the other courses such as De Appel and Le Magasin and the Whitney etc. in terms of differences and similarities.

AR: We have done, we very often compare notes, I think we pack more into our time than they do because we do it in a year and there's a question whether we should expand that but yes we do and we have differences and all of us have differences and I think what you would do is look at each of them and decide which was the way forward for you. There's certain things that we prioritise that we think are kind of the identity of our course and those are primarily things like that you have obligation to develop two of your own projects within the year rather than a group project, the students here do many group projects but they also have this.

PON: I think that's the key difference between Goldsmiths and everywhere.

AR: Yes and on paper it looks like a really difficult thing to achieve but actually it works brilliantly and increasingly now what we've got is that students do those projects and collaborative projects as well and that seems to me the optimum model.

PON: Do you have reading lists and lists of exhibitions that students should look at or research?

AR: Well it's funny you're talking about reading lists, the reading list is determined by the student precisely because when a new article on curating in *Art Monthly* comes out they put it into the system. In terms of what they go and see one of the things that we do here is that they have to write reviews and between them figure out how to cover all the exhibitions that go on in London and they have to write four

reviews a month. Not part of the course, frankly between you and me if they didn't do it they wouldn't fail the course but it's an integral part of building the vocabulary of what's going on out there and if you imagine that there's 25 of them and they're writing a review a week, imagine getting to 80 to 100 shows a month, that's pretty useful and if they can share that resource, on that wall it's the last couple of week's reviews, it's potentially very interesting and we have a website where all of that can get uploaded and that starts to become very interesting as well. What I want to do with that website is then actually make that, it's called curating dot net and make that much more useful on a public level, at the moment we're kind of using it internally but I think over the next few months we'll be able to spread that out as a resource.

PON: What are your current activities?

AR: What are my current activities? The irony is that running a curating course you don't get to curate very many shows, I mean there's always things that one sort of plans ahead, I mean one of the things that I am interested in and very involved with is I've helped set up a foundation that collects art and we're trying to build somewhere in London that can show that and that's another kind of curating that I suppose I'd never thought of before and we've been developing that for five or six years and that's starting to look like a real collection and once that sets up we would really like to see that as a place where not only we show the art that's within the foundation but also we start to view it proactively as a space and operate in a slightly different way from London and I think we'll see that increasingly in London, I think there'll be several more places like that that will take place, that will come out of the ground over the next few years, they exist in North America but they don't exist here. It's privately funded and it will be handed over to public use as it were, it's privately funded and with all the advantages that come with that, the possibilities that come with that but it doesn't really come alive until we make it public and so the whole structure of the collection is geared towards that.

PON: Thank you.

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JÉRÔME SANS

Paris, 15-04-06

PAUL O'NEILL: Can you tell me about the first show you curated?

JÉRÔME SANS: The first show I curated, gosh! Well, it takes me back to a long time ago, the first show, the real first one, which one will be really the first? I don't remember if it's the first. I would prefer to say, when I started curating or when I started to be interested in the visual arts, it was the late seventies, and in my country there were no magazines, no galleries, no institutions interested in what was going on with the younger generation. So the first thing I did was with a friend of mine, we did a tour in France because we were very surprised to see that in Great Britain specially and Italy and Germany, New York, many things were happening. There was a huge boom of a new generation of British culture.

PON: This was in the 1980s?

JS: Late 1970s is the bridge between '79 and '80. And we were very surprised that nothing was going on, so we took a car, we did a tour in France, and we were looking at works of art of younger artists, and we found very interesting artists at that time, and we brought their file to Paris, and made projects in caves of shops, back of bookshops, in my own bedroom, places like this, one after the other one, showing, most of the time because we had no money, and we're calling galleries, critics and museum directors, and they were just coming, just with a phone call. My first shows were like this. And most of these artists jumped directly very fast to galleries, and to magazines and like this and became visible. So my first shows were done like this with no idea of curating, the idea was just fighting for a generation which had no possibility of existence anywhere. So, well I suppose really it was a reaction towards what was happening here in this country before.

PON: How would you define your curatorial practice as distinct from others?

JS: Well I never distinguish anything from others since I was for my generation one of the only ones in my country to act like this, so I had never had to define myself in response to the other. I was curating not as a wish or desire, there were no possibilities to be a curator with the record I had, so the only way to do something was to invent myself, to invent my territory, to invent my vocabulary, to invent the way I was working, to invent the way I would live. So the idea was to always, to invent my own practice myself, never in regards to others, but with what I could do and where I could to it. So I started to curate mostly outside of the normal white box places, which means galleries or institutions. I worked in everyday life places from an airport, to the city in Hamburg, to using old answering machines of galleries in Paris, when they were all closing in August, I find so stupid, where it's the most visited town in Europe and there is no one open to show any art, so I invited international artists to do for each gallery a sound piece, so we could do a show at any time from wherever you were in the world. So before this idea of the internet and things like this where you could communicate very fast internationally, the idea was to visit an exhibition with your own schedule of time, with your own desire, with your own rhythm, so all my curating has been what it means to make an exhibition first. I was never interested to do any exhibition at all, like just mentioning a list of artists and saying this is the art curated, for me this is not curating at all. Curating for me is much more to be like an artistic director. For me to have a vision first, it's not because you put artists together that you are a curator. Well it became in the last years very academic, completely academic, and for me, I trust and I respect the idea of making an exhibition, as a platform of experiences, as a platform of thoughts, as an ongoing open book which is from one page to the other one makes sense. Is that because you're making an exhibition? The word curator doesn't mean anything at all for me.

PON: There has been, in the last fifteen to twenty years an increase in intensification around the subject of contemporary

curatorial practice. Do you think there have been dominant forms, dominant methodologies, dominant criteria that have emerged during that period?

JS: I would say there is an amazing increase of exhibitions. It has become like an industry of exhibitions. Well we all are saying in our world this is not, but it is actually an industry of exhibitions, and if we wanted I could do almost a show a minute, because there is so many wishes, desires to add more images, add more shows everywhere, so there is this obsession of having more and more and more. We have more and more places to exhibit nowadays but I see less and less experiences made inside places or outside places, real experimental forms. I see more and more an academisation or Macdonaldisation of the form of exhibition in the last years, or what is the name of this brand making coffee - like Starbucks. There is a Starbucksisation of the exhibition nowadays, I see that everywhere.

PON: Do you think that's predominantly in museums or on the international biennial circuit?

JS: Everywhere. It's mostly everywhere. That's why when we discussed with Nicolas in '98, late '98, about opening a place, not just to open a place, another place to make exhibitions, there is really enough places for shows, but together we tried to see if all the rules used by everyone, internationally wise, we never understood why everybody is following these rules, as it was the only one to work, were really the rules.

PON: Along with Nicolas Bourriaud you decided to have Palais Tokyo open from 12 till 12. What was the thinking behind that?

JS: It's very simple. It's, if you just think what is the meaning of having bank hours. Who else, unemployed people, artists and journalists can visit these places between 10 to 6. Well, imagine one second if cinemas, restaurants, opera houses,

nightclubs open 10 to 6. We are the only one in the cultural sector who are pretentious enough to think people will come from 10 to 6, specially at a time where the leisure time is becoming bigger and bigger for people. So how can you do, when on top of it, if you are a couple, and you have a child, how do you do? You will never visit anything, so we never listen to why people are always talking about expanding the number of visitors, how can they, in these kind of hours? No one can do anything. I'm myself missing most of the shows in my own city when they are just open 10 to 6. I am working until 8, like everyone. What can you do? So you leave your place at 8, and well, nothing has happened?

PON: Do you think that has impacted on the kind of audience numbers and the kind of participation of visitors?

JS: Of course, it had a huge impact. No one trusted that at the start, they thought we were completely naïve, immature, utopian people, crazy, and things like this. But the result is very clear, really clear. Of course, our audience understood this radical gesture with these kind of hours directed at the start. Of course, and many people come here just to hang out, have a drink, be out at night, meet friends, go to see shows or see what's going on here or any performances or events, of course. All my ideas of curating, always to think what is the meaning of what we're doing. Trying to rethink or repropose or test things with no formula. So the first thing we thought, this formula, why everybody, internationally wise, from Latin America to Asia through Europe, America, everybody has the same scale of hours, same walls, same way of communicating. The only things we change regularly are the names appearing on the wall. Do we see it's enough when we see what forms of exhibition? The exhibition starts from all these details.

PON: How does the kind of co-direction, because I know you've curated shows like 'Hardcore' and a project with Chen Zhen whereas Nicolas has curated projects like 'GNS' and 'Playlist'. How does

the infrastructure work in terms of the decision upon exhibitions?

JS: For the last almost ten years I have stopped to work by myself. I'm not interested in just speaking alone. I find it not interesting for me, I need more food, I need to be challenged, and I need to be, to have some food from somewhere else. For me curating, living, it's like living, everybody has their life and need both every day a cultural experience and a human experience. So I need to share, I need to learn from someone and I need to give to someone else and with all these things, something will appear. So Palais Tokyo for me is exactly what I have done before, collaborating with someone like we could collaborate after this talk on anything. It's the way my life has been drawn since the start, meeting people, inventing directly something. So with Nicolas, it was very important, specially for Paris, because Paris was trapped into two different clans, where things were completely like blocked, and we thought it would be a really good metaphor to be two different persona, we never worked before, we are not friends at all, we are colleagues who meet, collaborate, and share an experience together in Paris, and to be together on stage, in front of everyone, would be like an opening of a kind of a fresh air, in a very, very complicated place, and saying that an institution can't be just a monologue, can't be just one dogma, but could be much like a platform of different voices, the voices of, even sometimes when it's antagonistic, voices of what's going on nowadays, more generous, with a wider scope. So we, we worked like this in dialogue, challenging the other.

PON: When you started curating in the late seventies, early eighties, and even now, are there any past curatorial models or exhibitions or precedents or precursors that have been, had an impact upon your thinking about curating?

JS: You know I have learned everything from the artist. I used to, when I was 18, to spend my time in artists' studios and talking to them in a corner or listening, watching, smelling and

listening to all these critiques about curators, about exhibition directors and things like this, and I understood from the start that an exhibition has to be a collective experience and not just something spread by one person who asked the artist to fit into the thing. So, again, to share time together, to share an idea together and like being on a boat, sailing together, having a very strong experience like film making, and then leading two different lives, different other projects. So for me, curating has always been like in the seventies model, when artists or places I saw at the time were really like instinctive, natural, made with passion, with people I really wanted to do something, a project, in the ephemeral or longer term, but really with different people who choose themselves and made it together. So my work really was much more in reference to this period for me, where it was really natural and not something professionalised at all.

PON: Do you make a distinction between your curatorial practice and your co-directorship of Palais Tokyo?

JS: No, for me it's exactly the same. I look at the Palais Tokyo as one of my projects, which is for once, you know when you are an independent curator, as you may know, you are invited for one day, ten minutes, one month, maximum six months somewhere with a project, but you never live there six months. So, we live it, I live it, and always say this for me, it's like four years project in a place. So for me it's part of my practice and attitude, so sharing this with Nicolas for four years was, for this one exhibition, one project, where everything was going from one to the other one, from the start to the end.

PON: Would you say the 'Lyon Biennial', that you're co-curating, that it's the result of a two year period of dialogue with Nicolas or is it very distinct from the conversations that you've had with Palais Tokyo?

JS: No, it's exactly the result of four years, because we were a

year and a half before it opened of course, because it was like a ghost house, for ten years we had some time to put it up, but it's the result of three and a half years of sharing things and making things together.

PON: So what's the theme of the 'Lyon Biennial'?

JS: Well, the 'Lyon Biennial' is called 'Experiencing Duration' and the idea was that most exhibitions are seen in one second. You can enter into a room, you make the turn with your head, you see everything, and you go to the next room. We are in a time of consuming very fast, faster and faster, and we were thinking it would be very interesting to go back somehow. When we went to New York and we spent three hours in La Monte Young room, we had the memory of our interest in art. Art was about experiencing, art was about spending time, understanding, leaving the thing, and then spreading it out somewhere else. So we had the idea to make a show which will insist on the roots, our roots of coming from the sixties and seventies, with Fluxus, with counter-culture, with all this underground culture, and showing the link with all the translation of how it is now translated by some artists nowadays, and making an exhibition which will be an experience from one room to another one with a scenario or something, which will link you to different possibilities and things like this, and not just as a retinal thing or just a thematic with a very close theme.

PON: Will there be historical works in the show?

JS: Yes, we'll have people like Terry Riley, La Monte Young, Jonas Mekas, Yoko Ono, Tony Conrad, people we found very key figures, who are for most of them not really in the positions they should have nowadays, a lot of people like this who are really important somehow, who played really important cultural game, cultural one, and invented forms, new forms of thinking and of practising the work, to younger people now, mixing up and not making a kind of retrospective with historical line but breaking

the lines and showing how contemporary both are, next to the other.

PON: One of the dominant forms that has emerged since the late eighties and perhaps even prior to that is the group exhibition, and the group exhibition has become almost like the default button within curatorial practice. Do you think that the group exhibition is ultimately the serious work of the curator?

JS: The amazing, the funny thing is when you're an independent curator, if you just show with one artist people think they can do it by themselves. It's almost part of your contract, as independent, when people look at you they are waiting for something like a group show, and I have to say, I tried to resist to these kind of things many times. But it's quite hard because people really want to have something big, something with many people, with many things they don't know or they have no access to, or things like this. But I don't think it's the only one. For me curating, it can be from one artist, even one work, just one work, but framing it into your vision and bringing something else.

PON: There has been an ever-expanding increase of biennials in the last fifteen years. Do you think that we need more international biennials?

JS: Well, I think we need more challenging exhibitions. Of course there is an increase of everything, as I said earlier, of places for art, which wasn't the case when I started. There were very few places, the underground, with no money, we were, you couldn't - I remember being in London in '79 and meeting Eugene Ionesco at the bar of the Riverside Studios together with Bruce McLean and with Richard Long and Tony Cragg and having a get together and having fun. Well, where do you see that nowadays? That's the point, for me that's really the point, so I think we are missing places which are much more run in an artistic way or

run by artists who have really something to spread, rather than just a shoe box where works are just like decoration in houses.

PON: Palais Tokyo seems to be mediated as a space that's constantly in evolution, constantly changing and evolving and transforming itself on a day-to-day basis. Do you think that you're isolated within that kind of activity?

JS: Well, I wouldn't say we are isolated because we have many colleagues international wise who are interested in doing other tests. We are not the only possibilities of course, it was our taste, Nicolas and myself, but we don't say this is the only model to do. There are millions of other things to do inside this frame. We are just surprised that still now, there is a lot of difficulties to shake the trees and we are supposed to be in a world where we have no rules, we are smart, we are reinventing the world, but I find often that our world is very conservative, much more than other fields like music, cinema, dance, theatre, where many things have been invented inside the places. We are, and I don't know why, but we are, we are becoming too professional to whatever, but I don't know.

PON: Do you think it might be to do with the dominance of the art market?

JS: I think it's a question of desire of taking risks in life, in general. I think it's just, people are obsessed to make a career, and to say the right words to the right people, and to be at the right time at the right place and the right world and blah, blah. It's too politically correct. Most of the time it's very politically correct. I'm often sad to smell wherever I go, the same smell. If I go to your house I hope not to have the same house as mine! I hope to understand you with your way of having your things, with something, which I would not understand, but this misunderstanding or mistakes for me would be very beautiful, with the rest it would be very beautiful, very correct, so for me

it's kind of a personal thing. As I said if you come to my house, everything you will not understand, you will say he's mad, and you will see things, which will lead to your story, so maybe you will start from the way I am. For me the place of curating, it's the same. If I don't understand who is here, I don't understand anything. It is just, virtual things, virtual fingerprints everywhere, I don't understand. I really trust the directorship of things in the visions; we have to put our footprints into the artwork. But if I don't smell any vision, anywhere, and it's just the artist alone, isolated and so isolated and even the work is less framed than any frame, I find very sad.

PON: Do you still think that the model of the exhibition curator as author is still as predominant now as it was say in the seventies?

JS: For me that is the opposite. There is a lack of authorship, in places or in biennials, or in most of the projects I see. It's just, it's often just a list of artists' names, very beautiful, fantastic, but then, you understand why they are together, and what do they do? Where does it come from, where does it go, where is the topic? I think it's all the food around, all the spirit; we talk too much about the form and not about the spirit. I am an old fashioned man and I trust soul, I trust the human side of everything, and for me it's often missing. Of course there are some people doing it by chance. We don't think we are the only ones in the world, but there are not enough people who have really a personal gesture who can make in a special way. I really prefer people who have, you know what they are doing, who they are, their qualities, their limits, but I like that. Like in cinema, you go to watch filmmakers you trust or you like because they push their limits or you go for their world, not just going to cinema to go to cinema. Or you listen to music, you listen to special bands because you like their craziness, or the beautiful things they do or things like this.

PON: One of the criticisms of the international biennial circuit is the fact that they often employ the same circuit of international curators. I mean, take, for example the 'Moscow Biennial' recently where there was Nicolas, Daniel Birnbaum, Hans Ulrich Obrist, etcetera, curating a biennial, not for the first time for any of them, and there's a tendency within such biennials to import these curators from outside. Do you think that that's a problem?

JS: Well, it's like say, in the charts; we listen to the same people. I'm afraid when you're good, why should we change always the name of people? I think this is very much our world nowadays; there is an obsession of a permanent new blood. The new blood doesn't make any sense. I don't care if an old curator like Harald Szeemann who died recently, was so visible. He was the best. I'm sorry, what can we do? If someone were better than him, we would know. So it's the question of changing names. I think it's normal that when people have something to say, they are asked to do a lot of things. And I understand why Moscow asked all these names to be together. I think for me it's too many curators at the same time, I can't talk with all these people, so many people at the same time, it's too big. But it's another thing, it's a question of they wanted to be seen, they wanted to be understood, they wanted to be visible very fast, and they succeeded somehow. Very fast, first biennial, everybody heard about this biennial. You're even mentioning yourself, in this huge pack of enormous amount of biennial; I think they succeeded in what they wanted.

PON: In terms of how it was mediated?

JS: Yeah, of course, very clear.

PON: You've had experience with the 'Taipei Biennial' before and now you are curating the 'Lyon Biennial'.

JS: The first one was when I was the co-curator of the Danish pavilion of the 'Venice Biennale', to curate a show with American artists together with 'Venice Biennale', Danish artists, just to make a funny joke of what Venice is. It's a race, it's a race of nations, but not everyone has the same power to play, so it's a funny casino, where not everyone has the same power to play. So it's very interesting, I was, that's why I did a biennial, not in the French pavilion but the Danish pavilion. Then I went to Taipei, I was invited to make a biennial in Taipei, and there again I was really interested because why, Taipei was really far, like really isolated, no one has ever heard about any artists coming from Taipei or whatever, and I was interested because I was co-curating this biennial with a local Taiwanese artist, and I was very excited to share my experience as a Western curator with an Asian curator, and build up a project together. Really like a collaborative project. It was a really interesting experience and to bring in my experiences to the Taiwanese scene and to help them to build up something there, it was a very interesting human experience with all the people, that for me was one of the most beautiful experiences I had in curating projects, and if all the artists lived there a really long time, all together, and we had many, many talks, time together and experiences, amazing ones, which I would never have in Paris, for example. It was really a fantastic experience for all of us there, and again, I was interested because first I was invited six months before, people wanted to see a biennial but he never invited like two years in advance, you just have to work so it's always a last minute biennial, and so to invent something in six months was a really big challenge, the budget was very small, they had no connections with anyone internationally wise, so it was really exciting to do it.

PON: What do you think's going to be different between your 'Lyon Biennial' and previous biennials?

JS: Well, I think the first difference is ourselves, I hope,

otherwise we are going back to what I said before, it is like smelling the same perfume, and it would be very sad, I think. It's going to be a kind of very, how could I say, kind of very, very psychedelic, a very hippy biennial, very counter cultural, somehow reminding some us of our roots which for us are very important towards contemporary art nowadays, and I think like this, so I think it's very different than the one I've seen before. The first 'Lyon Biennial' was really around the French art scene, then they invited others to make a biennial about the idea of utopia then they invited Jean-Hubert Martin to make a global one, then they invited Szeemann and the last one was with Le Consortium and Robert Nickas which was a very good one, which brought it to another level for this biennial, and now they ask us well, to do what we wanted, of course, but we wanted to bring it to our roots of yesterday and now.

PON: 1987 was the year that the Magasin opened its doors as the first curatorial training programme in Europe and I know that you've done some work there. There's been an increase in post-graduate training courses around curating. Do you think that they've had any impact upon contemporary curatorial practice?

JS: Well, the thing is, I don't think you can teach curating. I was teaching at the start of the Magasin and I was part of a different workshop of curatorial programme, and each time I said I don't believe in this programme at all. I believe in realities, I believe in experience, personal experience you have, because you will know who is who in the art world, where is where, things that's going on, that you will become yourself, part of inventing something. It's just, if you have it, if you have ideas to propose, if you have vision, if you have any idea to do it, you can make it. It's not belonging to any curatorial programme, it doesn't exist, it's like saying that there are millions of visual artists coming out of schools, art schools, but how many are visible and have changed the world? Not many. I think it was a great idea at the start, I don't think today it's so, so efficient

and relevant. It's fantastic to become an assistant, an example of something…

PON: So you don't think curating is something that can be taught or something that can be learnt, no?

JS: No, it's like if you said, if we said, it's because we are, we did some lesson of making piano, that we can become the most important pianist tomorrow. It's not because you know how to make a painting that you will become the most challenging painter tomorrow, it doesn't make any - of course it can help you to understand the stories or whatever, but it doesn't make any sense.

PON: What's the role of art criticism in relation to your curatorial practice?

JS: That's a good question. For me it's the same, it's exactly the same. I always say there was an art critic in three dimensions and for me I stopped writing articles ten years ago and just insisted on trying to give back to the artists their voice, and I am more interesting to hear the artist talking than reading an art critic writing on artists. It's for myself I prefer devoting myself to artists' work and working with them in the long run. It's my personal way of being an art critic, but I - so is other people of course, who are like Nicolas or other friends I have who are more writers, it's completely different.

PON: Are there other curators who, or recent exhibitions that you've experienced that you think have been groundbreaking in relation to kind of historical paradigms?

JS: Recent exhibitions, good question. Well, what I like mostly is exhibitions that question myself. I have to say, 'Utopia Station' was interesting for this, in this kind of chaotic thing, even though I didn't notice everything but I was very like challenged somehow. I like that, I like these kind of places

where I came in and am challenged. I lose my parameters. For me, it's what I'm looking for all the time in my life, and in my work, to me the most really, most known shows. The only one I would insist is a completely different one, run by an artist; Rick Lowe, in Houston, Texas. He's a visual artist, who has done his work through a black community, which was one of the most dangerous ones before, where it was full of drug dealers, prostitution, gangsters, whatever, and he used one of the blocks which was the first house given to the blacks when they free, it's called 'Champion Houses', they are all the same form, some units, very small, and he was restoring them with his friends, and his idea was to invite artists to spend one month inside the community and to make work in these houses. He gave to all the women who had a child who have no husband; I don't know how you say in English - a single mother. There was a house, now from one small block, from one single line of houses, he has two blocks where he gives courses, there is a school for children, so he made a place like a pub and concert hall, and all this neighbourhood has been really cleaned by these artists, and it's really true, it's one of the most beautiful curatorial projects I saw since twenty years, it's amazing, very beautiful, it's not just fake, it's not just utopian ideas. It really works with all the community. Now people like you and me can walk down, quietly, throughout this community. Not the case before.

PON: One of the points that Mary Ann Staniszewski makes in her book *The Power of Display* is that there is a certain repressed history or amnesia towards exhibitionary display practices of the past, particularly because of the ephemeral nature of exhibitions. Do you think that this amnesia or this repressed history has ultimately impacted upon how we think about curating? Do you think that because of the ephemeral nature of exhibitions, that they often only survive in photographic form and often sometimes not, do you think that because of this lack of visibility of certain exhibitions in history, there is no history of curating, shall we say, there is no set history of curating. Do you think that this

has impacted or affected the way in which we think about contemporary curating?

JS: It's a very interesting question, since it's true that there are few books, I don't know any books that have done an interesting history of exhibitions in the last twenty years, for example. Of course we have many things on the history, but after the seventies, there is nothing, there is not a gap, there is nothing, as you said, of course, and because people are going, we have faster and faster memory, becoming smaller and smaller, so of course what wasn't even ten years before, they won't even remember, it's gone. Memory is very ephemeral in a way. It's like our cellular memory.

PON: The battery runs out.

JS: Yeah, exactly. Very fast.

PON: What exhibitions of your own, if you were to insert one of your exhibitions into the history of curating, which one would you desire it to be?

JS: That would be very pretentious. This I have no idea. One would be very difficult.

PON: Maybe two.

JS: Well, if there were two, I would take this one on the answering machine, which was called 'Before the Sound of the Beep' which was in '92. And I take Palais Tokyo.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

NICOLAUS SCHAFHAUSEN

London, 15-10-04

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator and what is your curatorial background?

NICOLAUS SCHAFHAUSEN: I don't have a curatorial background, I studied Art History, but at the same time between 20 and 25 I worked as an artist for myself but I've never studied art, but at that time I met Olafur Eliasson, Carsten Höller, Liam Gillick, Angela Bullock and some people who are my age, and some of them became friends, and then I figured out, for example, Liam Gillick, he influenced me, not my curatorial practice but he influenced me in becoming a curator, because I thought, what he, at that age and at that time, I thought there were some similarities of thinking, not of producing but of thinking what an artist can be, what an artist should be, and I thought he is much better.

PON: This was the early nineties?

NS: No, the late eighties, late eighties, early nineties. The early nineties I got several grants and participated in some bigger group exhibitions like 'Apertu' as an artist. I was invited as an artist to, for example, 'Apertu' curated by Nicolas Bourriaud who curated me as an artist but I wasn't an artist anymore. I got a grant and at the same time in Berlin a residency, at Kunstlerhaus Britannia. I don't know if you know, but it's a normal residency programme like I don't know, there are plenty of them. In that studio I started to curate little exhibitions. This is my curatorial background. OK, I started to work with friends.

PON: Do you think that there have been predominant forms of curatorial practice that have been about in the last 15 to 20 years?

NS: I think this is to do with art historical fashion and we can't answer it now, maybe in ten years.

PON: But you talked about and you mentioned Liam Gillick as being kind of a reference or an influence on your practice.

NS: Influence, yea, maybe he's now a reference but at that time he was an influence.

PON: Do you think that the relationship between artistic practice or what was, say, in the eighties, defined very clearly as being defined as two different forms of practice, that which of curating and that of artistic production, that they have been more aligned together within the last, since then, shall we say?

NS: You are asking about artistic production. For example, artists like Liam Gillick and all those of this generation who had a lot of success at producing in a way, I think the question would be much more interesting if you think about it as; is it art that they are still doing, or not? You know, I think, this is nothing to do with this curatorial practice, but much more to do with the art system at all or the art market or whatever, you know, I don't know what it is, I think the art production changed much more than the curatorial practice, because institutional strategies, pop strategies, popular strategies, economical reasons, economical strategies, globalisation, the biennial system, etcetera, etcetera. But I think you could go deeper than that, I can't answer this question, but I think it's interesting.

PON: Are there particular curators or curatorial models or historical precedents that have influenced your practice as a curator?

NS: No, I was more influenced by historical artists, by nineteenth century artists. Not by curators. You mentioned later, for example, how Frederick Kiesler was an influence on people, not only artists, but people, architects who worked on new archival models, like Frederick Kiesler for example, but there have been many, many, many others. How do you look into artistic production after 20 or 30 years? That influences me? On the other hand I'm not only a curator, I'm also - the German system is a little bit different to the - I'm not a freelance curator, I'm working as a freelance curator as well, but I'm also a director now, since I'm running the Frankfurter Kunstverein. It means at the same time I'm a manager, I'm a fundraiser. This changed my curatorial practice.

PON: And have you since working in the Kunstlerhaus in Stuttgart always worked within an institution primarily?

NS: Yea, at the Kunstlerhaus in Stuttgart it's a completely different institution. It's was founded by artists thirty five years ago, I was the Programme Director, not the Director, and Ute Meta Bauer did the same job before me. You can see that there I was just a curator, but before that three or four years before, I was running a gallery before for three years; Lucas and Hoffmann Gallery and before that I curated some shows, without an institution, but since ten years I am, yea, I'm an institutional curator.

PON: But you also operate independently outside that?

NS: Yes.

PON: In Mary Anne Staniszewsi's *The Power of Display*, which is about the history of exhibition installations at MOMA, she highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past, particularly the laboratory years between the twenties and fifties, and the curatorial role, if you like, played by people such as Alexander Dorner, Frederick Kiesler who you mentioned, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, Lilly Reich, Alfred Barr, etcetera, do you think there is an amnesia towards curatorial practice of the past?

NS: Sure she is right, but on the other hand, you never can understand the future without the past, just to quote Liam Gillick, but it's impossible to - on the one hand I agree, but on the other hand I think it's a completely different time. Art production and curatorial practice changed completely in what the people want and what the people need and what the artists produce. I don't believe in the art historical scene anymore, on the singularity and importance of individual art production. I think if you just look back into the eighties, you know, they are not a lot that is important anymore. You could say that it happens all the time, but I don't think so, it's more that it's a cultural product like other - I don't want to, it's not negative, I don't think it's, it's not done enough for archival, historical brains, for public brains, it's more open.

PON: I think in some ways the point that Mary Anne Staniszewski is making is that perhaps this 'amnesia', if you like, for want of a better term, it's more her term, this kind of forgetfulness towards, you know,

the practice of people like El Lissitzky in terms of his exhibition designs, people like Frederick Kiesler in terms of his kind of mobile display units, and also someone like Alexander Dorner and his kind of ideas about flexibility and the idea of a museum having slow and fast paces at the same time, that it often, a lot of the terminology or a lot of the language that they would have used to describe their practice would not be that out of place with a description of something like Liam Gillick's work for example.

NS: Yea but we definitely don't have any more of this individual authorship. It does not exist anymore, and also, on the other hand I don't believe in other curatorial models like 'Utopia Station', we should go deeper into it. This is something that I really disagree with other curators on, and, but I have never thought about this, this is maybe; I have to rethink a little bit. Why I am so resistant?

PON: So you would disagree with something like 'Utopia Station' as a curatorial model?

NS: Yea, yea.

PON: Why?

NS: Yea, that's working on amnesia of history. But I have to think about it a little bit longer, because I haven't thought about this, but it's quite interesting anyway. It's just done, you know its hermeneutic, it's just done for the, things that are done for the public, but the public is completely excluded. But this is maybe also something that I can say more from the director's side, not something from the curatorial side.

PON: That's interesting. And you would certainly distinguish between those two roles, in terms of your own practice, the role of curator?

NS: It's a problem. On the other end, I think that also the curatorial practice, in a way I like it, that I have done both at the same time, but now I figure out that the management part gets stronger and stronger, maybe you lose some of yourself as a curator but when you curate curators?

PON: I mean, are there current curatorial projects or initiatives that you think are breaking new ground?

NS: Yea, for example in our 'Populism' project we are working on. I don't know if I want to go so far, but I think not from the point of it as a sociological project but just from the curatorial side, and which way contemporary art is influenced by popular strategies and institutional structures and political things. We have to, I don't know, we are still in preparation and still inviting the artists but most, we don't invite very young artists, more artists who are already working since a couple of years, it's not a generational show. This could be, but I don't know yet.

PON: And is it a project where the final outcome will only be an exhibition or a number of exhibitions or?

NS: No, there are four exhibitions with the same artists, same 20 to 25, which will open simultaneously, or parallel and within three weeks, in four different countries, European countries, and four different models of institutions. There's one national museum, one museum, there is a modern art museum, one Kunstverein, and one Kunsthalle. The East, North, West milieu.

PON: OK. Maybe we could come back to this later on. In '96 you curated 'Der Umbau Raum' at the Kunstlerhaus in Stuttgart, which operates somewhere between being an information centre, an installation, and a meeting place. Was this at the time a critique of the contemporary art institution or what were your primary objectives with the object?

NS: It was completely the opposite; it was not a critique at all. At that time I was critical of institutional critique, I think it was still on the, I think mid nineties was the edge when actually all these institutional critique artists were working there like Fareed Armaly, Christian Phillip Müller, Andrea Fraser they kept their practice but it didn't work out anymore, but this was nothing to do with that. What I, at the time the Kunstlerhaus Stuttgart had two major exhibition rooms and had just transformed one room into an area, into a café, kind of a café, reading room, internet room, which was quite unusual for the

public, internet kind of café, that's ten years ago, nearly ten years ago, it didn't exist at that time, also it was curated, I asked some artists, I commissioned the works, but it was not unusual, some of them like Angela Bullock or Liam Gillick or some German artists already produced this kind of stuff. Benches, tables, communication spaces, launches, kind of 'chill out' spaces but this kind of, it wasn't only a working space, but it was a public office. I was sitting there, all my colleagues were sitting there, and we had this really intense dialogue through this, our audience. All the artists who participated in that, the other shows we have done, and it was only possible because the institution in Stuttgart in the south of Germany, it's a very well known institution, but Stuttgart is a small city, you know, you don't have hundreds of visitors every day, just maybe ten to twenty people showing up, but we did all the lectures there and the educational programme. We did an extremely intense educational programme at that time, very strong, close collaboration with the university and the various art schools from the area.

PON: Right, and were there other shows happening simultaneously in the museum?

NS: Yes, simultaneously in the room, in this 'Umbau Raum', but also simultaneously in the other spaces, which I curated, but not necessarily linked, intellectually linked to this 'Umbau Raum'.

PON: I mean there's also in '96 that Nicolas Bourriaud curated his show 'Traffic' in Bordeaux and was writing his first kind of essays about relational aesthetics as a term to describe a particular kind of art practice in the nineties that was involved in the production of certain kinds of social spaces within art exhibitions. Were you aware of Bourriaud at the time and his ideas about relational spaces?

NS: Yea, we spoke before, but no not really. But we worked with the same artists. Also I don't, even I was a co-publisher of his book on post-production. I don't agree with some of his ideas, it's also completely hermeneutic, it was not done for the audience, it's hard to say, but it's true, I don't know.

PON: I suppose if I were to be kind of flippant about relational space,

it's one of the things that kind of is coherent within all the artists Nicolas Bourriaud selects or decides to choose to illustrate his theory, is that one of the most primary ingredients of their work is lots of people, or the works necessitate a public. People like Rirkrit Tiravanija, people like Liam Gillick, Philippe Parreno, etcetera, etcetera, their works ultimately necessitate or they incorporate the viewer, the spectator or the visitor into the work in some way.

NS: But I think it never worked out, not in curatorial practice and not in artistic production.

PON: OK, so you think there's a failure there?

NS: Yes, there is.

PON: So how do you see your role as a curator within the potential boundaries of the contemporary art institution or notions of the contemporary art institution with the Frankfurter Kunstverein currently? How do you perceive the role of the institution or how do you see your role in terms of altering what they may potentially be, or do you see that as significant.

NS: Yea, sure I see that, you know, when I became the Director at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, first I thought about a new branding model, how to, with what, with whom, and I didn't think about the artists at the beginning, more about how to curate a completely new structure, strategy and branding, as a director of an institution, and I thought what to do. You always have to start with local needs if you're running an institution, and the second step is that you have to leave the local needs quite directly after. I had a very un-intellectual aim when I started to run the Kunstverein. I thought OK, there wasn't an institution like that in Germany, I thought OK, how is it possible to make the loudest, most pop, most sexiest institution for myself, or, is it possible to build up a new role model of the Kunstverein, you know, Kunstverein in Germany, in the German speaking context, which is a strategy of these bigger Kunstvereins in general and put it in a different light, but in the same direction, we have to show contemporary art, since nearly two hundred years, and we only need some new strategies and new models.

PON: Some of the exhibitions that you've had there, like 'Adorno: The Possibility of the Impossibility', and 'Neue Welt' or 'New World', 'Non-Places' or 'Nation', they were very large, ambitious, kind of thematic projects, which involved a certain kind of narrative as their focus. As the curator of such exhibitions, how did you perceive the relationship between the role of authorship, that of the author and that of the curator within the overall structure of those exhibitions?

NS: You are completely right. It is something else if I am curating a one person show, which we do frequently, all the time, but then also bigger ones, or the thematic group exhibitions. I started with shows about migration, or these shows 'Non-Places' or 'Neu Welt', most of these shows as it were, beside the exhibition itself, were not curated together but done together with the local university. It was to do with local needs and Frankfurt is a typical non-place, and for Germany an extremely rich and wealthy and modern city. It's a migrant city, etcetera, etcetera, but these are all themes which were, I wouldn't say this now, but it's a couple of years ago, which were not done, only in biennials, but not in these institutions, but to go back to your question, there is a very strong author, curatorial authorship and all at exhibitions, but why not? Why not, and curatorial practice has nothing to do with democracy. I would say not at all, and it's something really aside from artistic production, for me, as a curator, and this question comes later, a curator is not an artist, but curating is an artistic production; it's like a director, but this does not mean that you are using the individual artists. This is the most complicated of curatorship anyway, is, do you use the individuals or the artists, just taking part on your own or not, and this is something that, you know, if I link it to 'Utopia Station', I think this is something completely other. If you think about an exhibition or a project like 'Utopia Station', you always speak about the curators but you never know who was involved, why were they involved and what has he done?

PON: But in a sense, even to title exhibitions such as 'New World' or 'Non-Places' or 'Nations' or even before you see them, they are already incorporated within their title, is this an idea for a grand narrative, the idea of a particular story that can be told through the works?

NS: Yea, it's a brand, but also outside the exhibition, if you call something 'nation', 'nation' in German means something else, or maybe 'non-places' is better. We are dealing with an intellectual audience, in a way it's a special group and everybody has heard about 'non-places', yea, but you never get what you think that you can get from an exhibition.

PON: And would I be right in saying that the Adorno show was quite a different show to the others?

NS: Yes, it was on the one hand a different show because I always think about the local needs, and Adorno is one of the most prominent figures and this institution in the nineteen fifties and sixties and seventies, was extremely influenced by the Frankfurt School and by Adorno's Institute, by his students and also visited by his students and it was just to celebrate, in a way it was a celebration of Adorno. This was not a Kunsthalle show, it was more a museum show, and I wouldn't say it was just a curated show, it was more…

PON: A celebratory show or?

NS: Yea, also, and a historical show even with new, younger artists. It was a link between philosophy and institutional practice, or between institutional practice and the artists and the social world. It's such a complicated question. No, but it was one of my most beloved exhibitions in the last few years. And then you know I wanted to go back to change the institution again.

PON: Curators now, as you kind of noted earlier, are seen now as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks, through exhibition making. How do you see your role as a curator and at what level of artistic production do you see your practice being involved in the process of art making?

NS: It depends whom, but I think you have an influence on art production at all, especially if you commission works, or if you are working closer to some artists, then sometimes you get what you want, or what you need, and it depends. It has nothing to do, somebody strong enough, but I don't agree that it's, I think this is more how curators

were seen a couple of years ago, end of the nineties. I think the role of a curator changed much more now, and goes back to a more conservative art historical or cultural historical production that we have to work on contextualisation of art practice and all, or historical practice or archival practice.

PON: It seems you are kind of making a distinction between the idea of curation as something that is about working with existing artworks and then working with existing art practices?

NS: Yea, this could be right, yea.

PON: And would you say that you work between the two?

NS: Both. It depends on the exhibition and it depends who the artist and is other things.

PON: 'Der Umbau Raum' would be very much about working with practice, whilst the Adorno show seems to be very much, very much about working with specific works.

NS: That's right. Yea, Adorno was working with specific works.

PON: The term 'performative curating' has been used to describe a self-reflective practice associated with contemporary art curators. Do you think that this is an appropriate term in defining maybe what you do?

NS: No. I don't like the term. If you are a curator or a director of an institution, you are always a performer. It's the same, it's always, sure, it's whatever, is a performative art production what an artist is doing, and what is it? OK, you can tell when it is performative curating but it's used in the negative, I see it as much more neutral.

PON: Much more neutral?

NS: Neutral, yea.

PON: You would like to take a much more neutral position?

NS: But it's impossible, anyway, to take a neutral position.

PON: Do you think that a curated exhibition can be an artwork in itself?

NS: No, no.

PON: A keyword that Seth Siegelaub used in the sixties, late sixties, early seventies was 'demystification' to define the changing role of the curator of his generation. Do you think that this is a term that we could, could also be useful to describe what contemporary curatorial practice is doing?

NS: It depends; I can be quite cynical about measuring art production, when I'm not showing this kind of production. I always wanted to do a B show, but it's impossible to do it, it's like ...

PON: What do you mean by a B show?

NS: A works and B works. A movies and B movies. This would be, no, I think we have another time, I think it's more, I think it's more mystification, I think this you can name much harder, it's more about, something we don't describe, is cynical, ironic.

PON: One argument would be to suggest that, what Siegelaub was suggesting was that the idea of a group exhibition being kind of made up of a number of artists or a number of artworks, that it is important to make that kind of selection process more visible in the final exhibition.

NS: It's already obvious, you know, biennials are always very obvious why it is done, biennial is not an art, it's a biennial. It's another kind of a contemporary production, art production but not for shows which, why, for whom?

PON: Well I suppose in the late sixties it was a different time. But I mean one would suggest that someone like Hans Ulrich Obrist, although he has been transparent if you like or has kind of demystified his role within the exhibitionary constructs, there is also a greater visibility

on behalf of the curator within that, so therefore in a sense it's almost like a remystification because the curator becomes more visible and then kind of slightly disappears again.

NS: In which way? But I think it's a lie. Really, I think it's not true, 'Cities on the Move' is a much better example but this was completely the opposite of this, what he has done with 'Utopia Station'. Yea, you think that he for example, he is working on his own demystification, with shows like that, I think that's more and there I would agree, but I think that's the wrong direction, I hope this is not, this kind of curatorial practice becomes not so influential like other curatorial projects by him, then developed by younger curators in all the curatorial courses. No, I think this is the wrong way, because we are much further, and I don't want to criticise him. I think that if I would describe, or should describe what should happen now, with this curatorial practice, I think we should not go back to, just go there, what does it mean as cultural archives, this is really key. Maybe it could be important to demystificate curatorial practice, that's something else, yea, but with Siegelaub it is exactly the opposite.

PON: I mean how would you demysticate what you would do?

NS: Locally it is a completely different scene to this wider biennial context or whatever but it means as a practising curator who is running an institution, you do this every day, but also if you're doing a biennial or whatever you do this also.

PON: Have you ever had the opportunity to curate a biennial?

NS: Yes, I had the opportunity but I didn't want to. It depends which kind of, which biennial. It depends on which context and which country and I don't believe, it's impossible to work local in so many different contexts. I'm working at the moment in Korea, doing some things, it's so complicated. I want to do a biennial but it depends which biennial. Everybody wants to do a biennial.

PON: Yea, but it's one of the criticisms that's often used for someone like Nicolas Bourriaud is that he always works, generally works with the same group of artists and maybe adds a few artists to that list for each

show, even though each exhibition ends up being primarily about…

NS: It's networking.

PON: So is the other subject, so you have a show like 'Playlist', which is about kind of a remix. You have a show like 'Traffic' which is about relational aesthetics. You have the show about new cartographers, new cartography in art called 'NFS', but with a lot of the same people.

NS: I saw that, I think he was influenced by 'Non-Places'. [Laughs] On the one hand I also worked with some of the same artists for many years, for a much longer period than doing one show. On the other hand you can, you know, you don't stay outside anymore and you can't criticise it anymore. It's both, it's not easy to.

PON: So do you think it would be helpful or do you think we should evaluate what a good or a bad curated exhibition is?

NS: Yes.

PON: How would you describe a good curated art exhibition?

NS: I don't know, it's very complicated, because art criticism is everywhere something different. Art criticism in Germany is completely different to say the UK, because the daily newspapers are so important, and we don't have this strategy of media partners. But I think also art production and also a one person exhibition should be criticised much stronger than is usually the case. The same is also, coming back to thematic exhibitions, I think you have to criticise a lot to - I actually think that the curatorial practice changed in the last ten years because all the new kind of institutions we have everywhere. I don't think from the biennials. I think much more from say Tate Modern or all the new, or the Flick Collection in Berlin or the big new private collectors, or the new emphasis on strong private collections which are now everywhere in museums, not only private museums, financed by the State, etcetera, with public money, this is changing much more curatorial practice and artist production. Not in a bad way, you know, in a way we go back to Medici, or to a very elitist model of what art always was, or to a very elitist cultural production. It was never

something else.

PON: So are you kind of suggesting the idea of the curator as a historian would be, perhaps improvement is the wrong term, but perhaps a kind of a progressive way forward for curating?

NS: It depends, there are a lot of curators anyway who are working in the eighteenth, nineteenth or early twentieth century, you are just, you know, you are just speaking about contemporary curators who are, but you know too, if you speak to younger curators, some of them have very little knowledge about what is exhibition making, anyway, because they are quite often referring to other curatorial models. Jens Hoffmann is a very good example. I am also not against it.

PON: Do you think he adapts existing models without actually altering them?

NS: Yea, very successfully in a way, but…

PON: I think, I mean, this question about, should we be able to evaluate what a good or bad curated exhibition is comes from something that Liam Gillick wrote about about three years ago, four years ago, at this conference in the Baltic about curating, and he said that the real problem with curating is the lack of cohesion or the lack of a relationship in contemporary culture, is the divide between criticism and curatorial practice. So if we are unable to define what a good exhibition and a bad exhibition is, it's because of an outmoded form of criticism. How can we decide from outside and from within, if you are the curator, how can you decide when you're inside that, whether it's a good exhibition or a bad exhibition from a curatorial perspective?

NS: The thing is, it's an extremely complicated question, you know, especially if you travel around so much. On the other hand, you have artworks, some of them are boring and some are not. It's nothing to do whether it's good or bad, it's more about for what is it? But it could be much more dynamic if you would criticise more of art productions, our curatorial productions or the whole culture of production. It would be much more interesting maybe.

PON: I mean one question that I think would be productive is, is exhibition good for culture?

NS: Yea, but this is what I said in a way, so, yea, for the cultural life, for cities, you know, the audience, cultural life, yea. Sure, for what and for whom?

PON: I mean, which of your projects do you think have been most significant in expanding the parameters of the role of the contemporary art curator from your point of view?

NS: The Adorno show in a way, but also 'Populism', it's always the immediate things but it changes after the process, when you see an exhibition, the expanse of what I'm working on. I think everything. I know what you mean, but I can't…

PON: Like if you couldn't decide what you think is the most successful show.

NS: Yea, but what is success?

PON: Of course I'm asking you to define that within the response.

NS: Yea, what is success, I don't know, you know, after, I don't know, yea.

PON: Well, which of your shows was good for culture?

NS: The most successful exhibition I have ever done was at the beginning of last year, 'Deutsche malerei zweitausenddrei', a painting show and I wanted to do a blockbuster show that gives the people what they want, and I wanted 50,000 people and it worked out. It's really highly perverse to do it and then everybody hates it…

PON: And you're very aware of that?

NS: I knew it before, and I also, you know, I wrote in the catalogue.

PON: In the last fifteen to twenty years, there has been unprecedented

interest in what contemporary art curation is. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during this period? I've asked this question before, but - as someone who has operated during, say, the last ten to fifteen years, I'm very interested in what you were saying about even the last two years there having been a kind of a shift, if you like.

NS: No, there is a shift, it's because of, you know, the more entertainment role of being a curator, working as a curator, running an institution, and there's a lot of cultural political reasons also, I think many think a little bit more about not only cultural practice, but cultural politics. That's everywhere the same, the city branding, not only biennial branding, all this. Sure, it changed incredibly, because you are, as you know, curators are underpaid, as if you, not me, but usually a curator if you compare it to a successful artist. I don't know, twenty years ago, if you look into the middle European situation, like the Netherlands, France, Germany, but also now Poland and all these countries, many, many more new institutions like new Kunsthalles, etcetera, but it does not mean much more audience or it's a different audience. Sure, it changed a lot, but more that you are working for, you know, for the cultural, what you said before, cultural life at all, it's entertainment, but I don't think it's bad.

PON: It's something to acknowledge.

NS: Yea, that it's, that's it.

PON: Maybe, well I hope I'm correct in saying this, but I hope you don't mind me saying this, but I would see your practice and someone like Charles Esche and Maria Lind as being somewhat, not necessarily similar, but the kind of political aspects of what you do, in terms of taking on the local context, what is an institution in relation to being in Frankfurt, like what Charles did in the Rooseum in Malmo and like what Maria did in Munich, it's like really kind of a question of what can an institution hopefully be politically as well as culturally within a local context?

NS: Yea, but the local context means also directly a national context. I think it's a little bit different here. But what, you know, I haven't

been to this Baltic conference, but if you look at especially what these centralised countries like France and England try to do, but it's not working out historically, nationally. It's such a media country, Germany. It's the same with the Rooseum strategy; it's completely the same. I agree. It's little bit different to Maria Lind, she tried to select events and have a more floating programme.

PON: And do you think we need more post-graduate curating courses and institutionally led training programmes like the De Appel in Amsterdam, the Magasin, RCA, Bard in New York, etcetera? Do you think they are a good thing?

NS: I teach at some, or was invited, not to all of them, but I went to some others, but to quite a lot of them. People who graduated from programmes actually are working in Frankfurt but it's just fashionable, fashionable study programme, which has nothing new, in a way. It's just done before in another way. I think it's just, I don't know, what I do like is that curators and artists are educated at the same time, and this would be necessary to mix these courses up, also there's writers and not only curators, etcetera.

PON: Because on one level, you could argue that they have increased the level of critical discourse around curating. On another level you could also say that they expanded the notion that curating is something that could actually be taught.

NS: I don't think so. But maybe for some people, not for me.

PON: Do you think we need any more international art biennials?

NS: Why not, I'm not against biennials. But I don't think it's necessary - it depends, yea. Why not? I think, not 'Documenta', but both of the Korean 'Gwangju Biennale', which is visited by more than one million people, mainly local people or national, they have a national audience, why not? I'm not against biennials, but it's more, it's something else. Biennials in Asia are completely different from European biennials. I'm not against biennials but I think, I think museums are much more important.

PON: I mean, one criticism of biennials is you know, the idea of curators or the idea of anybody, any author, given the responsibility of representing culture globally, and the idea of the exhibition of being kind almost like an autonomous artwork.

NS: I don't agree, an exhibition is never autonomous, I disagree with Harald Szeemann for example.

PON: How would you describe your current activities? You mentioned the show 'Populism'.

NS: Yea, that's quite interesting, I can send you the material. I'm working on several group exhibitions, but for museums, I decided that I'm interested in biennials, yes, but it depends which one. At the moment personally I'm much more interested in working in museums, it's quite interesting, anyway. They need something, something else.

PON: I mean, one of the things that distinguishes your programme at the Frankfurter Kunstverein, and also I think your practice in general, particularly the last maybe five years, is your equal focus on the solo exhibition and group exhibitions, which if you look at someone like Nicolas Bourriaud, who is very, very adamant about the role of the curator is to curate group exhibitions. I mean there's obviously an ideological position there.

NS: No, no, I like to do, I wouldn't describe myself as a writer, but you know, it's extremely interesting to do various very, very proper one person exhibitions. There's a need, you know, for cultural practice and for artists, but I have much more fun doing group exhibitions.

PON: There are a lot of artists that you are obviously interested in. Are there any curators whose practice you're also interested in currently?

NS: I'm always interested in what other people are doing, other curators are doing, and I can answer that, but there is nobody. I was influenced, the only curator I was influence by was Catherine David, and I highly respect her. I worked as her assistant for a while for

'Documenta X'. At the time when I was in Stuttgart, then I quit the job. It was my only assistant job, because we had too many fights, but it was quite interesting, ten years ago. I think it's the same then, maybe it is something similar to artists influencing themselves, I think you are always influenced by other curators and curatorial practice. OK, how can I do it, compare it to my own curatorial practice, but I'm not - I like to work in teams, as you know from the Adorno show. Adorno was such a complicated; it was an extremely complicated exhibition. Usually I am building up teams, the same as 'Populism', 'Populism' was my idea but I thought it was not possible to do it alone.

PON: Like research teams or think tanks?

NS: Think tanks, yea, then also we have three curators with 'Populism', but we have different roles, but it the end it is like one authorship.

END OF TAPE

SETH SIEGELAUB

Amsterdam, 25-07-04

PAUL O'NEILL: Looking back now, how would you define your activities from 1966-1972?

SETH SIEGELAUB: First I had a gallery, which was a very ordinary gallery, from the fall of 1964 to the spring of 1966. The period that you are talking about, however, is somewhat later because I didn't get up to speed until probably late 1966. Although I showed a few interesting works at the gallery I wasn't very clear about what I was doing, why I was doing it, or even how I got involved with it. But the period that you are referring to is the exhibition-making period, and that really began to come together in 1966, 1967, 1968 with the exhibitions themselves taking place from early 1968 to 1971, after which I gradually began to leave the art world, and then New York itself in 1972, to live in Europe. The height of my activities was between 1968 and 1971, when I independently did 25 exhibitions or so. At first I thought of myself as a dealer, linked to the interests of the four artists Robert Barry, Douglas Heubler, Joseph Kosuth and Lawrence Weiner, and to a lesser degree, Carl Andre. My interests were very closely allied to working with them to devise exhibitions, structures and conditions that were able to show their work, which would reflect what their work was about. In other words, it became clear to me that the solution to the problems that were posed by the nature of their work and the ideas behind it, that a gallery was not necessarily the most ideal environment to show it. By that I mean not just the physical gallery but also the social idea of a sort of 'semi-religious' sacred space, that everyone knew and visited regularly, a sort of 'art space'. Part of the problem was to present the work in a different, broader framework that was not a 'consecrated' art space. Thus my 'job', so to speak, was to find those formats, to find those new structures and conditions to be able to show their work. Initially, it started with these four men and Carl Andre too, although his work was based on a very different set of aesthetic principles. To be able to do this meant showing their work, say, indoors or outdoors, dealing with art-making problems, or art and exhibition environment problems and things like this. In my own history it is clear that my interests moved from a very specific group of artists to a more general group of artists, to a more general art problematic, to a general social problematic framing the art problematic etc. By the time I was doing the Studio International exhibition in July-August 1970, I wasn't even selecting artists anymore, I choose 8 art critics who would in turn choose artists. I was always trying to move away from the individual 'art

genius' or the personal quality choices that are essential for an art dealer; to choose what he or she thought was the 'best' art, etc. My history thus moved towards the more and more general, to artists' contracts, to political fundraising, etc., which eventually of course led me entirely away from the art world. Many of the aesthetic problems or issues that were being dealt with at the time led me personally to think about questions of the media, the left media, cultural imperialism, etc. Everything was going in that direction.

PON: Were you working with artists and not primarily artworks?

SS: Definitely. I've always said that my relationship to the artists was collaborative. It was a very close thing. No one would come into the gallery and ask me to sell a painting, because it wouldn't have got them very far. I was never a good businessman dealer in that sense. It never really occurred to me while I was dealing that one could make real money. It was about the excitement, intellectual ideas, or changing the world which was the turn-on. But it never really occurred to me that the point of Lawrence Weiner or Carl Andre was to by one at $5 and sell it for $500. I am not dumb, but this was not why I was doing it. I was always more interested in the problems of art-making and exhibitions, and finding situations for the artists to work in, or working closely with the artists to be able to realise projects. Many of the projects that I did were in fact collaborative. This relationship was probably a new, perhaps revolutionary one. Not in a literal sense that we all sat down in a room, but in the case of the January show, 'January 5-31, 1969', we actually did all sit down and decided how we were going to do this project: should we show any work at all or should we just have a catalogue as exhibition, etc.? I also decided that no works were to be available for sale to remove it from the usual gallery business environment. Collectively we eventually came up with a format that the four artists and myself were happy with. I went out and found the money to do it, but not all the projects were like that. I tried at the very beginning to be a sort of agent without the need for a space. Most of the projects I did were inexpensive, just like the work itself was inexpensive to make. The projects had to be something manageable, something I could handle without being involved with too many people. Projects I could finance myself, or with help of a few close friends. The projects I did then - as well as all the projects I have done since - were relatively inexpensive, which at least gave me the means to

have the allusion of freedom to be able to do what I wanted at the rate I wanted. More like research and development as opposed to merchandising or mass marketing.

PON: Was this a critique of the dominance of the 'white cube' at the time?

SS: No it wasn't a critique of the white cube in that sense, but it was the fact that the work that these artists were doing was not fundamentally related to an art gallery type of space, and not just as a physical thing. The space of the art gallery is one of prestige, a social space created by a group of collectors, promoters, dealers over a period of time try to build up a kind of 'prestigious' environment whereby, that anything you put in it would hopefully absorb a kind of quality by virtue of the gallery space it is shown in. Of course the museum's trick too is to make itself appear as prestigious as possible so that no matter what art is put into this space its quality is upgraded dramatically, thus becoming a self-fulfilling prophesy. It poses the troubling question: is an artist great and thus his work is shown, for example, at the Museum of Modern Art, or does the work become 'great' because it is shown, for example, at the Museum of Modern Art? It follows this logic. It wasn't so much in terms of the physical space of a gallery, because I would agree that a gallery could well fulfil the spatial needs of a painter. But what I was more concerned about because of the nature of the artist's work was that they were doing something else which could best be seen out in the world, on billboards, street corners, paperback books or anything else. I was constantly searching, along with the artists, for new ways of getting this work out in to the world without requiring people having to come to a 'sacred' space or art-shrine. This was also the spirit of the time when you think of 'guerrilla theatre', graffiti, and many other things at the time. It was about being able to confront a more general public, not necessarily an informed art public. Along with this were inherent new qualities of the work, not just the dematerialised and physical aspect, but that the works were trying to question their status as commodities, saleable objects or permanent collectible objects. Thus I was constantly searching for ways of dealing with this material that would best reflect the material itself. This also corresponds to the fact that I was - and still am – relatively not rich, so I didn't have a problem with not having a gallery on Madison Avenue or something, as I could never afford it anyway.

PON: In Alexander Alberro's recent publication *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity,* which focuses on your practice, Alberro appears to be careful not to use the term 'curator' to define your practice from 1966-1971. Would you have called yourself a curator at the time, or how would you have described what you were doing?

SS: I probably wouldn't have used the word 'curator' at the time, although I have recently done so in retrospect because there is a whole body of 'curatorial' practice that has quantatively evolved since then. During the 1960s there were few people like Harald Szeemann around at the time. He was Director of a museum in Bern, but this guy was all over the place (and he still is in fact); he was a true one-man show. I am not familiar with the history of curating, but I am somewhat familiar with my contemporaries, people who were working at around the same time as me, like Harry. But the first thing I want to say is that all the different art world categories were breaking down at the time: the idea of gallery dealer, curator, artist-curator, critic-writer, painter-writer, all these categories were becoming fuzzy, less clear. In a certain way, it was part of the 1960s political project. The 'information society' was up and running, and many of these different areas were very touch and go, people were moving between things and doing many different things. If there wasn't a critic available or interested, artists would do their best to explain, write and publish what they were doing. While I can look back now and say that curating is probably what I was doing, it is not a term that I would have used when I was active for one simple reason: the dominant idea of the curator at the time was basically someone who worked for a museum. Since then, the definition of the term curator has changed. This is just another facet which reflects how the art world has changed since the 1960s/early 1970s; the art world has become much bigger, richer, more omnipresent; there are many more museums, galleries, artists, art bars, art schools, art lovers, etc. It is has also become more central and more attached to the dominant values of capitalist society.
Years ago, when we were active, the art world could be considered like a pimple on the ass of capitalism. It was thought of as a marginal area, or a ghetto, where strange people did crazy 'avant-garde' things. It is clear that, in the last thirty years or so, art has become a more acceptable profession, even a type of business, a more acceptable thing to do, both as a practitioner, as well as an art collector. One can think of becoming

an artist as a possible 'career choice' now, which just didn't exist back then. One just didn't have this opportunity. The question of the curator, in this context, is also related to another modern phenomenon today: the need for freelance curatorial energy to invigorate museums that no longer have this kind of energy. On the one hand there is a multiplication of people who are involved with curating and exhibition organising etc., while on the other hand the people working within many institutions are becoming more like employees working for a big business. So the idea of independent curators can also be used by these institutions too, because many of the people working in big museums are more and more concentrating on practical fundraising, organisational issues, budgets, administrative tasks, etc. So in the past, people who were serious curators, say, like Alfred Barr, who was involved with selecting, buying, curating and collecting are now involved in fundraising, trustees, all sorts of business-oriented activities. In that sense the growth of independent curators also gives the museums a source of energy to do interesting things, if they choose to do interesting things.

PON: Are you saying that these larger art institutions and the role of independent curating has become interdependent within the art world?

SS: Yes, I would think that there is a definite symbiosis in many ways. I have the impression that we are seeing much more of the creative exhibition energy coming from outside the institution. There is a new interrelationship between the museum and curator, because there are now many many new museums, a hundred times more than there were 30 years ago. Now every little town almost has to have a modern art museum of some sort. So independent curators are one way to use these exhibition spaces without having to keep people on the payroll, or to pay pensions or health insurance, etc. It's like all freelance work or outsourcing in any profession, it can be a very cheap way of keeping the creative energy flowing without the fixed payroll overheads.

PON: Did you have a sense of isolation within what you were doing in the sixties or were there other curators or art dealers you were influenced by or in dialogue with during that period?

SS: It was a very small but active community. There was no sense of isolation. People may have thought someone was a little crazy, but there

was a very active bar life, exhibition life, and travel, especially between Europe and the U.S. This was the beginning of a generation who travelled regularly; even people without much money were able to go to Europe a few times a year, which was totally unthinkable before this period. All that was in the process of changing. From New York there was much excitement about what was going on in Germany, Italy, France and England. There was no sense of isolation, particularly in New York, where there were great art bars where you would hang out and talk all hours of the night on all possible art and political subjects with a wide range of people. There is always a kind of isolation for a group who consider themselves as an unappreciated 'avant-garde' because they feel they are not getting the recognition they feel they deserve, but that is really bullshit, of course, and often, temporary.

PON: Did you think what you were doing at the time as particularly unique or were there other people doing similar curatorial projects?

SS: There was Harry Szeemann as I mentioned earlier, but he was doing something very different. He has always worked within a very broad spectrum, from the avant-garde to Swiss bankers, advising collections, working on museum boards and things, so he would not really be an example that I would refer to at that time, but there were interesting dealers active at the time, like Konrad Fischer, or Gian Enzo Sperone, Kasper König, and especially, Dick Bellamy. I also remember in a more general way there was a good critical environment; people always interested in writing about the projects and coming to the exhibitions and talking about the work and the ideas behind the work. We weren't lost in the backwoods; it was really very active; there were a lot of people around even though it was a relatively small community. There were four or five art magazines or something like that.

PON Your practice seems much more atomised geographically than say the new kind of international curator, travelling from biennial to biennial?

SS: This came much later; we were only at the beginning of these phenomena in the 1960s. There were connections between New York and Los Angeles, but the New York-European relation was the new horizon, between what Carl Andre called the NATO countries. One was constantly seeing people coming and going, dealers, critics, people like Germano Celant, Harry Szeemann,

Charles Harrison, etc., but the whole international biennial thing that exists now, just didn't exist. The one important thing, for me at least, was the link between United States and Europe, and to a certain extent, Latin America too, but I was much less aware of this aspect.

PON: How do you think we suffer from amnesia with regard to a curatorial history?

SS: I don't think it is amnesia but rather ignorance, but I am probably one of the amnesiacs. Although I was vaguely aware of Alexander Dorner's work and that of El Lissitzky, mostly from the political publishing as he was important for many other things. I knew Alfred Barr existed and in Amsterdam there were very important activities with the work of people like Wilhelm Sandberg at the Stedelijk Museum who were also very imaginative museum people, but I was more like a newborn baby and I was just concerned with my artist friends and the problems arising from their work. I didn't have to look for inspiration. There are one or two people, however, who come to mind as influencing my practice. Dick Bellamy, a dealer, although I was not particularly interested in his artists, he was close to many artists and could get things done, and was highly thought of. The other person was someone a little older, who in fact he died almost on the same day as Douglas Huebler, was Gene Goossen, Eugene C. Goossen, who was basically a critic but also, in his way, a kind of an independent curator. He did a number of shows at MOMA in the 1960s, including Barnett Newman, among others, and also curated a show called 'The Art of the Real', around 1970. He was involved with younger artists, such as Carl Andre, Robert Barry, and a number of other artists, and did one of the very first shows in 1964 of what would later be called minimal art. But most interestingly he was the head of the Hunter College art department and he was able to give artists teaching jobs, which was very important for survival. For some reason I don't think he realised his full potential, but was highly regarded by many artists, and like Dick Bellamy, looked closely at art. I suppose I was mostly inspired by their close relationship to artists. Most of the other people, including Harry Szeemann or Germano Celant or Kasper König, were more like contemporaries so I wouldn't have looked to them as predecessors even though they may be somewhat older. There was also dealers like; Konrad Fischer who, with Hans Strelow and Jürgen Harten, did the 'Prospect' exhibition, which was

another example of the breakdown of boundaries which was going on at the time.

PON: You are often cited as one of the first 'creative' curators. How significant do you see your contribution to the idea of the curator as a creative component within the production and mediation of art and what influence, or impact do you think your projects had on altering the perception of what the role of the curator could be?

SS: I would agree with that. I think more in action than in theory. In other words, I didn't theorise my position, and if you look back at the interviews I gave in the sixties and early seventies the word 'curator' probably didn't even come up. I thought of myself in terms of an organiser, a publisher, exhibition maker, and things like that. Also the word curator at the time didn't have the open meaning as today, as curators were basically people who had jobs working in the museums. Thus it wouldn't really have occurred to me to be a 'curator' at the time because a curator worked at a museum, so how can I be a curator when I am not working at a museum? But I probably was not very involved in a very self-reflexive practice in that sense. Furthermore, much of the opinion or analysis I am giving you now is over 35 years after the fact. But if you look back on any of the interviews I doubt I thought of myself as a 'curator'; more like an exhibition organiser, project maker, things like that.

PON But you would have thought of yourself as a creative component within the process and not merely a facilitator?

SS: Yes, but not too much and I always avoided the 'are you an artist?' question as being irrelevant. I was not making art, and my materials were not Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler, Lawrence Weiner and Joseph Kosuth or something like that. But this idea seems to have become today an important issue, where curating may have become a kind of manipulation of other people. Yes, I was very creative but only in the sense that one can be a creative bicycle rider, plumber, or anything else; one can be a creative in anything if one approaches one's work with a certain kind of imaginative spirit. It's strange; it is as if only artists are creative, so if you are creative you must be an artist or something like that. I think the work of a dealer or exhibition organiser can be very creative,

but I think what people are really referring to, in my case, is the fact that I am very closely identified with the artists that I worked with and it was indeed a very close relationship. It's a little more difficult to separate the nature of the art making process and how it's linked to very site-specific situations, inasmuch as my role was to try to provide the situation. In such a close collaborative relationship my work could be misunderstood as that of another artist. But it's also a more contemporary concern; during the last ten or fifteen years this idea of the 'curator as a kind of artist' has become an issue. This also goes back somewhat to the break down of categories I mentioned earlier. But I think it is only retrospectively that the term curator is something that I am comfortable with in relation to my work.

PON: A key word you used to clarify the changing role as a dealer/ curator in the late sixties was 'demystification'. How relevant do you think this term is to evaluating contemporary curatorial practice?

SS: It is difficult to say, other than it was definitely a hot word in the late sixties, but I am not sure of its relevance today. On the one hand today there are large exhibitions that include many artists from the so-called 'third world', but it is not clear if the purpose is to show the aesthetic energy and ideas of these people who twenty years ago wouldn't have been seen or rather to harness their energy into an understandable capitalist context? I am not so sure if 'demystification' is a key concept today. I was very surprised when I walked through 'Documenta XI' in 2002, although there was much work that I had never seen, many of the artists from these 'third world' countries lived in London, New York, etc., apparently in order to be able to produce their work and have it seen. Is that bad? Not necessarily, but it certainly does not demystify capitalist values and its art and culture. By integrating more and more artists throughout the world into capitalist values, its aesthetic systems, into its machinery, I would not refer to as a demystification of the relations between what was called the 'first world' and the 'third world'.

I think, in our generation we thought that we could demystify the role of the museum, the role of the collector, and the production of the artwork; for example, how the size of a gallery affects the production of art, etc. In that sense, we tried to demystify the hidden structures of the art

world. I am not so sure if that is what I am seeing today. Mostly what I see is an explosion of different personal and cultural sensibilities, which has a more 'free for all' character; itself not a bad thing. But I don't think curating today is about making the hidden mechanisms more visible now. Maybe they are about promoting unknown artists from Africa or Asia or elsewhere, but not necessarily demystification. Perhaps a type of subversion? I am not sure that we ever demystified anything, but many activities also had a clear political dimension, artist's rights, anti-war, etc. linked to the art exhibition project.

PON: In 1968, you curated the 'Xeroxbook'. Was this a means of curating a large group exhibition without a fixed gallery space?

SS: It could have been, but there were only seven artists; it wasn't that large. What it was really was a curatorial project in which I proposed the parameters for the artist's participation in the exhibition: each artist had twenty-five pages to do what they wanted with it. I later tried a similar project in which each artist was given a day to do their work (the 'One Month' exhibition, also referred to as 'March 1969'). I wanted to be able to provide a standardised metric to the exhibition environment with the thought that if everyone had the same basic parameters to do their work what they would do would be their art. In this case in the format of a book, but it could also have been a space somewhere. I always found it strange that often in group exhibitions some artists have more space or the means to have larger works than others, showing a clear preference by the organiser, making it more difficult to look at the art and the exhibition as a whole. Or when one artist is on the cover of a catalogue for a group show; I have always found that it is unfair for the other artists in the show, as if this one artist 'symbolises' or 'represents' the exhibition.

But the 'Xeroxbook' exhibition, in fact, was never published as a 'xeroxed' book, it was printed in offset. I have never liked the term 'Xeroxbook' as it gives the misleading impression that the Xerox Company had something to do with it, which is not the case. Furthermore, as an aside, it should be remembered that in the 1960s the word 'xerox' was then virtually synonymous with 'photocopy'. A few years ago the art bookshop Printed Matter wanted to do a retrospective about the book and how artists have been influenced by photocopying, and I said it had nothing to do with

the technique of photocopying, it was just a practical way to get the project done very inexpensively. That was the primary reason. The idea was to produce an exhibition project. I like the term project because it is never clear what exactly is meant by it. I am currently beginning to work on a project related to a certain aspect of physics, and for many years now I have been involved with a bibliographic project on the history of textiles and it was only after a number of years did I have an idea what form this project could take. I would have preferred to keep the potential of the so-called 'Xeroxbook' as open as possible. I wouldn't have referred to it as a book necessarily. I would have stayed with the word 'project' because it covers lots of different things; it is more open and full of possibilities. For all I know, the book could have been done as a radio program or a film or newspaper or wallpaper or today, as an internet site, who knows what; I have no idea.

PON: At the time, you also talked about catalogues as 'containers of information' that were 'responsive to the environment'. What did you mean by this?

SS: Probably what I meant was that in general catalogues illustrating traditional artworks like painting and sculpture were 'secondary information' about an object that is 'primarily' somewhere else. But for the kind of work that these artists were making and the ideas they were dealing with, the catalogue could function as something very different because the information it contained was primary information. It wasn't information about something that was somewhere else, it was all there in front of you, it didn't have to be bigger or smaller or in colour. This is what I probably meant by a 'container of information'. For example, the Xeroxbook was primary information. This was probably the intention behind many of my publication projects.

Publishing was and still is very important for me. I really like publishing things. I have been able to use publishing over the years as a way to support myself and to engage with the world. In the 1960s I always tried to distribute and sell the publications that I produced to be able to support myself, and eventually, possibly the artist, but the publications were very inexpensive, around $2 or $5. They weren't particularly successful to say the least, but it was possible to sell a few to some interested dealers such as Gian Enzo Sperone, Konrad Fischer,

Leo Castelli or John Weber, and they were always an important potential source of income for me because I wasn't really very good at selling art. I had no independent income and that was a way to survive. Publishing was also a way of publicising the projects we did. At the time, there were no bookstores selling these types of projects, with the exception of George Wittenborn in New York and Walther König in Cologne. I was also a great believer in mail order, and I would often send announcements and things via the mail, but less so now since the advent of e-mail. But as a means of supporting myself at that time the income from the sale of publications, although no one was running around buying these books, $2 here, $2 there really helped to pay the rent.

PON: Was the publication an equivalent site to the gallery?

SS: Yes, after I had the gallery on 56th street, I realised that I didn't like sitting in the gallery, and after a year and a half, from the fall of 1964 through the spring of 1966, I decided I would never want to be trapped indoors like that again. Not only were there were very few people around at the time looking at art, but for a small totally unknown gallery like mine you would get about five people in a day, and four of which would want to use the bathroom, have a glass of water, ask directions, and the fifth would be Lawrence Weiner dropping by to talk. It really wasn't at all like the galleries in Soho or Chelsea today; where even the least-interesting gallery today would have hundreds of people walking through in an afternoon.

PON: So your public was very localised?

SS: It wasn't just localised, there were just very few people in the art world at the time. If you were an unknown gallery there were even fewer, and even when they knew who I was there still weren't many people; even at the now well-known 'January Show' 1969, there were not many visitors. It wasn't like it was a great fantastic success. One had to be very publicity conscious, like a Warhol, a person who could really sell themselves, which was never the case for me and the type of projects I did.

PON: Why do you think there has been a resurgent and insurgent interest in Conceptual art over the last 5-10 years?

SS: Difficult to say, as the old joke goes it's now our turn in the barrel. Maybe nostalgia for the good old days and its struggles? Maybe people think of it as the 'golden age' of contemporary art? Maybe people and institutions wanting to increase the value of their collections? But there does seem to be a more serious reason. There is little doubt that the kind of artistic practice, questions and possibilities that were opened up by the generation of artists working in the mid-late 1960s, including the group of artists I was working with, as well as others, is still today both a very important historical reference and a contemporary point of departure for many young artists, and its influence is still being felt. Our generation of artists made it possible that anything could be art. It may have been Donald Judd who said it, but it was artists like Lawrence Weiner, Robert Barry, Douglas Huebler or Joseph Kosuth, and a few others, who actually did it. At that moment the whole nature of the art-making process changed, not just the subject matter of art but the very relationship between art and life. It was very different than Fluxus and Surrealism, which in spite of their attempts, were still operating within the art world context. I don't think this current interest comes from economic speculation in works from the period, as perhaps was the case with Pop Art, as there is still relatively little money to be made from these artists. It seems that the works and the ideas generating them are still very close to young artists' hearts and that's where I think most of the energy and interest comes from. I think a number of artists are a bit let down by the period because we promised so much - to get rid of capitalist art values and the commodification of the object, etc.- and didn't quite do it, but the promise is still there. I think this interest is really an artist-generated phenomenon, even though they may not always be aware of much of the actual work that was done during the 1960s, but they do get the sense of the period and its possibilities.

PON: Does it seem to you that this is the moment that the history of this period is being written?

SS: One of the things that have always struck me is the fact that there is no critic that lived this period that is still interested in writing about it. Lucy Lippard and others were active in it for a while but moved on to other things, which is normal. Although he was not personally involved in the period, the research of Alexander Alberro has become absolutely invaluable as he has made a great effort to rediscover and document the

basic historical sources of the period, and he certainly knows more about the period than anybody else. It is not like you have a Harold Rosenberg who wrote over a long period on Abstract Expressionism or Michael Fried on colorfield painting, etc. There is no critic attached to our moment for a long period so most of the interest has come after the fact. There are good books and catalogues by Anne Goldstein or Anne Rorimer, among a few others, but you don't have the critical continuity that goes with somebody having being involved and fighting for it over the years. So most of the critical interest has come from people who write about it from time to time. It is possible that a lot of the historical facts are getting lost, but nevertheless between the work of Alexander Alberro and Lucy Lippard you have a pretty good idea of what went on at the time. I am not really involved in this kind of historical research accept maybe to participate in conversations like this. I do have my personal archives, which Alexander Alberro has organised and used for background for his book *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity*. Part of the archive is still here in Amsterdam, but most of the material is in New York.

PON: How involved were you in the Art Press publication on Conceptual art called *The Context of Art* from 1996.

SS: Very; it was a great project, but it was done independently not for Art Press, they just published the material in French with additional visual material. Over the years I have been asked many times to do a 'Conceptual art' exhibition and I have always refused, not wanting to become a professional 'Mister Conceptual Art'. But when I was approached by the German art dealers Marion and Roswitha Fricke from Düsseldorf in the early 1990s I again said no, but that I would be interested in doing a project dealing with what happened to all the artists involved in the art world in the late 1960s and their attitude about the art world between then and the early 1990s. I thought it would be interesting and perhaps significant to have their opinion about how the art world has changed, because one of the things which is most striking about the art world to me is how much it has changed during this period, and they agreed to do it. They did most of the administration and artist interviews, and it was published several years later in French in *Art Press*, partly in Dutch in *Museumjournaal*, and has just been published in English and German by Navado Press (early 2005). It was kind of a sociological project; I was happy to be able to do it. I wanted to get a sense of the period, not just

via the successful artists but also those who have since been forgotten, and their opinion about the art world and their own life. It was very interesting, and at one point we were going to do an exhibition, but decided that it was too complicated and unnecessary. To do the project I selected 120 artists active during the period and who showed in 5 'avant-garde' exhibitions in 1969, including 'When Attitudes Become Form', my 'One Month' project, etc. We found that ten or twelve were dead, another ten we couldn't even find, another twenty or so wouldn't reply, and finally we were able to get around seventy replies. Most of the replies were not written, but the result of the work of the Fricke as they went after people and did interviews with artists like Mario Merz, John Baldessari, Victor Burgin, Bernd and Hilla Becher, Lawrence Weiner, among many others, and it is thanks to their efforts that this project became so interesting.

PON: What did you think of Alexander Alberro's *Conceptual Art and the Politics of Publicity* which very much focuses on your specific role within the development of conceptual art from 1966-71?

SS: It is an important historical contribution to the period, especially, my work. However, I just didn't like the use of the word 'publicity' in the title. I think it is a generational thing. For me it has negative connotations which suggest that I was some kind of advertising huckster or a Charles-Saatchi-type hustler. Yes, I did do lots of mailings and tried to use whatever media resources I had, but I never thought of myself as that sort of person. It's clear the way he writes about it that 'publicity' is some kind of virtue. I gave him many suggestions for another title, but I think someone at MIT Press insisted on using that word. But most important, he certainly has done his research and I personally learnt a lot from it as it contains many hard facts which I had long forgotten.

PON: Have you read the early interviews book *Recording Conceptual Art* that Alexander Alberro co-edited with Patricia Novell, who had interviewed you in 1969? How do you feel about your interview with Novell being published now? What do you think now about your responses to her questions?

SS: Yes. I wasn't unhappy about it being published and it was a long time ago, but I don't think I said anything particularly dumb in it. Some of the people who were also interviewed at the time, like Carl Andre wanted to edit parts or Joseph Kosuth, who wanted to rewrite his interview, so eventually these two interviews weren't published. As for my participation I couldn't even remember what I said at the time; 35 years ago!

PON: With much of the artists you were working with, the work was often quite invisible or ephemeral and there were significant issues of how the projects could be seen, or how works could be experienced or disseminated? Was this one of the key issues you had to deal with in an innovative way?

SS: One of the basic problems was certainly how could you communicate to someone there was a work of art there, period. We never had a final answer to this problem because the works are so different and thus call for different solutions. Probably the most difficult problems were posed by the work of Robert Barry because he really works on the edge of these kinds of problems more than anybody else with his radio wave or radiation pieces. I mean, how do you tell somebody there is a radio frequency in a room, how do you label it, how do you put it in the catalogue etc. Even when one walks into the room you don't know its there without some kind of prior information. It was definitely one of the problems we had to think about carefully. For example, in the 'January 5-29, 1969' exhibition, there is an overall installation photograph which contains one work from each of the four artists, but I just couldn't find the Lawrence Weiner work for a long time. It was only when I referred back to the catalogue/exhibition that I realised that the work was a stain on the rug on the floor which was barely visible. Those kinds of problems were sometimes very important. It is somewhat easier when you are dealing with works within the context of an interior space, but it really becomes a problem with outdoor works in the countryside or on city streets or walls, etc. You really had no feedback with these types of works, or even if people experienced the work, it was just out there in the world. It is somewhat less of a problem with an object one cannot situate, like Douglas Huebler's photographs which do not have any inherent pictorial value in themselves (they have been referred to as the 'dumb photograph'), but can only be understood as part of a whole linguistic and visual structure.

But there was also many works where it was obvious where the work 'is'. The publications were one way of dealing with this 'visibility' issue. Furthermore, far more people will see a catalogue/exhibition or a catalogue of an exhibition than will see the exhibition itself, if there is one. But it solves some aspects of this kind of art. In other words, to see a painting in a magazine only gives a little indication of what the object could possibly be in its primary real life. It definitely was clear that many more people were going to see a catalogue than will ever see an exhibition. No matter what exhibition it is. A book or a printed piece of paper circulates and communicates far more than the 'objects' it describes.

PON: Do you think that the catalogue has almost replaced the exhibition as the main means through which we now experience art?

SS: Yes; its importance has definitely increased. And this aspect was an important part of our project. For us it was essential because it was a logical outgrowth of the artwork itself. Also there weren't that many catalogues around at that time, so that one was much more aware of them. But also it related to the work in another way; when one received an invitation for a Robert Barry exhibition you would have to ask yourself what am I looking at here, is it an invitation, or is it the work itself? This was the case for some work of the other artists as well. There were all kinds of these questions being discussed. Although catalogues have become more important for all types of art, Alexander Alberro is right to say that our publications could be considered as advertisements directed towards people who wouldn't see the exhibition, if there was one, of course.

PON: Do you think a 'curated exhibition' can be a work of art in itself?

SS: I would say no. It seems like a very manipulative thing to claim unless all the artists have agreed to be the curator's oil paint. But there are also museum interventions by artists, such as Joseph Kosuth's 'The Play of the Unmentionable' at the Brooklyn Museum or certain projects by Hans Haacke, which use the pre-existing works in a collection to make some kind of political or cultural statement, but this is quite something else. These are two different things. I don't agree with the manipulation of others, but if the artists agree to be part of such a project, why not?

PON: Why did you decide to stop your curatorial activities in 1972?

SS: I left New York in spring 1972 to live in France and I was interested in other things. As I said earlier, I moved from working with specific concerns relating to a group of specific artists, to working with more and more different artists, to asking critics to select artists, to a generalised interest in the conditions of art exhibitions, to organising projects concerning artist's rights. I gradually moved towards a more and more general interest in art, which eventually led to an interest in left media theory by the time I left for Europe. By 1972, I was interested in the practice of journalism, and thinking about doing some kind of left newspaper in New York. I was certainly moving away from the 'artist as genius' thing, and I was looking at the more sociological, political and economic questions concerning the artist's relationship with the art world and to the wider world. That was my trajectory in a nutshell.

PON: Was the 'Artist's Contract' a part of moving away from the art world? It seemed like a perfect end point.

SS: Absolutely. As a matter of fact, I have been reproached by Lawrence Weiner who was against it at the time, as he felt that by trying to protect the rights of artists the contract was in effect making their work into another type of capitalist merchandise. However, there were other artists who were for it and used it, and still do use it, I am told. To me it seemed perfectly logical final project to end my involvement in the art world, although I couldn't have foreseen this, of course. But I definitely wanted to get away from the promotional business of individual artists. This is also logical as I was never a good art businessman, and I only did it for the challenge and the excitement.

END OF TAPE

MARY ANNE STANISZEWSKI

New York, 27-05-04

PAUL O'NEILL: So what led you to write *The Power of Display*?

MARY ANNE STANISZEWSKI: Oh goodness! It was a dissertation, I had been living in and growing up in the New York art world, and I was trying to figure out a way to really frame the art world and to make sense of the art system. I was noticing certain things about the art system. I absolutely did not want to do a monograph, which my school really was pushing me to do. I had a lot of trouble even just pushing it through. The tyranny of the monograph is much stronger than anyone probably could imagine. I had the deluded ambition and the ego not to want to spend my life writing about just a single other person's practice, however innovative that framework could be. I really wanted to make some kind of analysis, a kind of social analysis about what I thought was going on in culture. I initially started by looking at popular culture and advertising. I was flailing about for a while and then I just realised that there was this blindness in the art world to what I thought was really the most powerful aspect of this system in terms of creation of meaning. It was a blindness to this massive continuous elaborate cultural ritual that was manifesting in these massive, ever proliferating, cultural monuments that we call museums and art galleries. I had this vision of all of us, thousands of us, millions of us, walking through these galleries, standing in front of these objects, having this experience over and over and over, thinking we're looking at a single painting or a single object, and being completely blind to, or ignorant of, or unaware of really what was going on, going on in terms of our experience as subjects, as individual participants in culture. I was really thinking in terms of the vastness of civilizations and all the different ways that this thing we now call art, but this kind of visual cultural practice was always a part of culture. It's the most ancient thing that we have, those little hand-marks on the cave paintings, and how throughout the history of civilization, human beings have created visual, oral, environmental experiences for themselves, and we have this very self conscious subculture where people would go and walk through these absolutely

white rooms, kind of decontextualised from architectural environments and look at individual objects, one on one, and it became astounding to me that no one had really exaggerated and pinpointed and put the klieg lights on the fact that this kind of practice where people just stand in these decontextualised environments, standing one on one, looking at these creative objects as circuit cells and they were kind of looking at mirrors of themselves, and it was this, to me, a blindness to the ideological conditions that we were breathing and swimming and living in, that this entire system, no matter what the artist did, and despite all the innovations to try to counter it, most of the experiences in galleries and museums were these experiences where you were just standing one on one, in white rooms, and it was an experience that emphasised your autonomy and free will and a certain mythology about this kind of absolute autonomy and decontextualisation of the self that was the dominant, liberal, humanist discourse that so pervades the modern era. So I felt it was a mission of mine to make visible this invisible element of this very, very common practice or experience of most individuals. And also what was interesting to me is, there were moments, let's say early in the twentieth century, where there was much more self-consciousness about how environment shaped your subjectivity or experience and how, for some reason, this had disappeared, and I've often asked myself, how did I come to this formulation. I think it was just growing up in the contemporary art world and my discourse has always been, maybe, the artists, even though I am a very traditionally trained art historian, and all my artists and friends were all involved with institutional critiques. I was very interested, you know, the people I'd been drawn to; Hans Haacke, Group Material, Muntadas, all of these people were always, maybe some of these affiliations came later, but I had grown up in a context where there was an awareness of installation and installation practice, but then that conceptual leap, in terms of the entire system, didn't seem to be made. People were interested in installations but they were in the framework of the individual artist's practice, and there wasn't this leap to the whole system

being this created environment, and then, I don't know when I discovered it, my friend Christopher Phillips had done a very interesting article. He's a curator at the International Centre for Photography right now, on the photo exhibitions at MOMA, and I always try to remember when exactly I put it together and I was already reviewing MOMA archives at the time. I was also doing a small essay for a Muntadas catalogue, but there was something leading me to go and look at the exhibition installations they had at the Museum of Modern Art and I was astounded at what I found. It was a completely lost archive of images of the possibilities of exhibitions, and I was astounded at what I found. I had never seen exhibitions quite look like this, strange esoteric exhibitions explaining Picasso paintings, wild exhibitions of pop art flooding, just filling the Museum of Modern Art. Garden, ethnographic exhibitions transforming the galleries into places that look like a hut or a Navajo cave painting area. I was just astounded and I said, this is a completely, this is a lost practice, this is such a lost element of our history. Why have all these exciting and diverse types of exhibition experiences been forgotten? Why are we standing in a primarily white or whitish walled interiors, staring one on one at paintings, or just going from one installation to another installation in a big white museum? So I don't know what actually led me to that archive. I remember I might have gone to work on the Muntadas thing after I was into it. I'm not quite sure what the trigger was. I know I was aware of Christopher's article but I wanted to go look at this archive. I was trying to figure out a way to frame the system and I was kind of flailing about as we do, looking for topics. But I was really aggressively and ambitiously and, in a frustrated way, going against the grain in terms of what the system wanted me to produce, trying to find a way to analyse the social system, and to not …

PON: So did you see it as a project that would somehow extend Brian O'Doherty's work on the white cube?

MAS: No, I wasn't engaged with that. It's so funny, it's not that I didn't think the work was important, it's just what you were reading and what was being emphasised, and I had a terror moment, once the book went into print, wondering whether I had referenced his work because I knew it was important but I hadn't been engaged with it. I actually got up in the middle of the night one night to make sure there was something in there about him, and I went back later, and I know I looked at it earlier on, but it just shows you the individuality of one's creative mind or intellectual mind. It just happens to be what you're working with and what enters your field of vision, so to speak, and it wasn't emphasised, because I was being trained in a different way. I knew of the work but it wasn't, it was more of a peripheral awareness that the emphasis was slightly different, and it was really more, what really triggered, there were other factors that really triggered the initial formulation, and it wasn't that. It's not that I don't respect the work, it just happened to be with, you know, who you run into in the street, what books happen to be hitting you, and it's always been an interesting example for me, what, how, what really shapes one's mind.

PON: It was obvious to me that perhaps you hadn't read it, because obviously the language that you used was particularly different from the language that O'Doherty was using, which to me was quite specific to that period of cultural activity in New York, shall we say, specifically during that time. But on one level, I see your book as a history of installations at MOMA, but on another level, what was really exciting for me is that it's actually quite a history of modernism and modernity from a spatial perspective as opposed to a linear narrative perspective. Would I be correct in saying that's an aspect to it?

MAS: Yes. In fact, it's been very frustrating for me in terms of the reception. I felt I, in all my books, try to give instructions for the user, let you know exactly what I'm trying to say, but it,

the real, it's a huge critique, first of all, of the entire discipline of art history, which is not - all of my big critiques, I said it in the beginning, but no one seems to have done gotten it. The entire of art history, however Marxist or contextually specific a critic may be, has really been blind to the fact that the object's meaning can be almost made opposite by its context, and it really is a critique of my entire discipline, which in a sense I feel I'm leaving, because I have a critique available. I don't feel I'm a traditional artist, I mean the limitations of the field are so frustrating. For me it also was a US history showing how the art system manipulates works of art so that it mirrors the mythology of the American liberal sense of self. It was also really about subjectivity and identity and it was a manifesto really about visual culture, as opposed to just art history and the blurring of the boundaries of various institutional frameworks. In fact, I even, if I do another edition, I have, this is not just about this, it is an exhibition history and it is an installation design history, and it also shows the limitations of current art practice, like, how do you get out of the bind of the power of the institutional frame, because even the most creative and aggressive artistic curatorial or installational practice somehow gets subsumed within this larger cultural framework that's very political and economic and fundamentally rooted literally almost to the national state of the US or wherever else it is, so there were all of these other critiques that no one got, they took it so literally, in terms of just exhibition and installation and for me that was the symptom, and it was a much more ambitious project, which I'm hoping, if I write this next book, people will see the connections. But the real thing is people and our subjectivity and what we've decided to create for ourselves to exist in. So yea, for me, people, and a lot of people really, everyone kind of missed the point, but there was this other more ambitious…

PON: The book also seems to be a desire to represent the involvement of artists within the production of the history of the

museum, its practice, and museum practice, and display, as a form of critique, both a social critique and also a critique of institution, what you call institutional critique. Was that something that was very clear for you from the outset, or even as a reader, having read it after you finished it?

MAS: I would frame it a little bit differently. I was thinking more in terms of notions of one's humanity and one's creativity, and I was giving examples of artists making traditional art objects but there is just as valid creativity in the curation of exhibitions, the writing of texts, that it was a kind of multifarious, or there were multiple possibilities for realisation of one's creativity. I think there's a real problem with the field of curation and the professions associated with museums and galleries - people don't view those practices as creative practices. The curators should be artists in a sense, they should be thinking creative which doesn't mean thinking creatively. I don't mean that they have to do these kind of auteur shows where it just becomes about the ego or the vision of the curator, but each exhibition should be inflected with an eloquence of expression where the installation and the invitations and the catalogue and the wall-colour, and every little detail should have been selected for the most eloquent articulation of what that exhibition is about, and it goes to the much more fundamental emotion of creativity that I feel is a cursor or pathology of modernity, because in modernity in the past twenty years we get this, that is the past two hundred years we get this separation into certain kinds of disciplines and autonomous fields, and what happened in modernity is that the notion of creativity became the privilege or the domain of the artist and, I feel, actually, in an ideal world, this is, all activities and all human expression has the potential for creativity. I feel, let's say, the suburban or urban sprawl we have, the kinds of toxic food we eat, the bad interiors we live in, all of these things would be fixed if each individual who is creating or making something was really viewing their work as this kind of creative, intelligent act. I know

this sounds completely utopian but I kind of believe it - it would solve all the world's problems in a sense, and we have this condition going on in a field that's associated with culture and creativity, that is museum practice and they don't view themselves as creative individuals. It resides in the domain of the artist but, of course, these are very creative acts - there are certain more idiosyncratic, highly visible figures that you have mentioned like the Szeemanns or the Obrists or Okwui Enwezor who did the last 'Documenta', or Catherine David. They try for more creative curation and they are visible for that but most, ninety nine percent of the people who hang the show, are not thinking in terms of a creative act, and so we're getting a kind of, it creates a problem for us in terms of what we view as culture. You know, just throw a bunch of things in a white-walled interior.

PON: From another perspective, *The Power of Display* could be read as a kind of reproduction or a reification of Alfred Barr as the father of the modern museum, for want of a better expression, and even after *The Power of Display* was published, there have been quite a few publications on Alfred Barr. That's obviously something that you cannot be responsible for but, in a sense, if you were to read that very recent history between your book and these other publications, there is a connectivity suggesting that perhaps there's somebody out there wishing to produce this notion of the birth of the museum as something that Barr was responsible for.

MAS: Yea, I would say, you look for your paradigm, you look for the case studies in culture that seem to manifest all the characteristics and contradictions of a particular cultural entity in its most exaggerated or full form and I found that in the Museum of Modern Art, and Alfred Barr was the inaugural curator, and I do view MOMA as the paradigm or a paradigm of a modern museum. I think there were other individuals who had potential like Alexander Dorner, had the war not come. Dorner could have maybe had the role of Barr, but no, he ended up in a small museum, in the Rhode Island

School of Design, because of an accident of fate. So Barr, to my mind, is the paradigm of that type of curator in that he was best known for the more autonomous white-walled interior is perfect, and I think it's very interesting because René d'Harnoncourt was a very different character, more forgotten, because his creativity was in the installation and he wasn't a scholar in that way, he was more of a dealer, an entrepreneur, an artist himself. He made these magnificent drawings and Barr was more the scholar, the modernist, but not completely so. I was trying to not put him in that box because he did experiment and - so yea, I think that's just the condition of or the curse of creating a paradigm or a case study but I think that they hold. I think that the US is the paradigm of the nation state for modernity. I think there are paradigms and we choose them like any myth. There's a truth in myth and there are truths in the case studies and paradigms and it's just a way of getting a grasp on naming. So, yea, I mean, I would never do, I mean other people can write their bios of Barr, that's a valid practice, but not for me. I hope I answered, did I answer that?

PON: I think that, ultimately, you're not responsible for this, but I think that due to this 'amnesia' the term that you use in your book, which I think is a very, very useful term to describe a lack of visibility of these types of practice, particularly within the period that you're looking at, and I think that with there being such a dearth of historical research and existing literature on the history of exhibition making, but obviously your book has added to that greatly, and I would say that since then there's probably maybe two or three pretty poor historical publications to be added to that canon, if you like. And I think that when there are only five or six publications that are actually on everybody's reading list within every post-graduate course and within every curatorial post-graduate course, these books become the producers of subsequent paradigms, if you like, and I think that the emphasis on Barr as the beginning and MOMA as a vehicle through which to connect the European avant-garde and how North American modernism and modernity played out. The links

between cultural practitioners in both those continents and the links between them in relation to how exhibitions are produced and why these exhibitions were produced, creates a cross cultural historical dialogue between people. I think that it can still reconfirm this primary notion that we're working with an American model of modernism and modernity in terms of its historicisation and museological discourse but I don't mean in terms of its practice.

MAS: Yea, and I think the US does reign, I think it is a kind of, I may be adding to it, but I'm actually completely content with that because I feel it really has been the dominant power mythically, and who knows how long it will last, so I felt I picked the right paradigm and I was critical of it, enough. It's like any symptoms of culture, I have no trouble aligning myself with the thing that has the most power, that has had the most influence, and I did my best to inflect the reading with an awareness of how I was struggling. The book is really about power and the creation of the self, and I was dealing with the thing that had the most power in terms of this late modernity moment - the last fifty years in terms of discourse. So, yea, there's always a problem, you feed the system, but I'll always embrace that contradiction because I'll always embrace popular culture because it is so powerful and also I like it, but it's you know, I'm not going to shy away from where the power lies just because my hands might get dirty or I might - of course I'm going to add to its power in a certain sense, but it was a critique and, in fact, I wish in a certain sense the book is a failure.

PON: It also reads as a critique.

MAS: Yea, yea, yea, I know, I called the MOMA blind and, I mean, it's so ironic. Also, because they don't seem, they look at the picture but I don't think people read the text. People don't realise what a critique it was and they don't really care because it's not changing curatorial practice, it's more like just a voice

in the wilderness saying hey, this is going on. So what!

PON: I think you're wrong in saying that it doesn't change curatorial practice because the amount of undergraduate and post-graduate students and also curators and those working in curatorial ways that would have been aware of Dorner and *The way beyond art* which, as you know, was last published in English in 1954. So although we've all tracked it down, we've all read it, we're reading it in an isolated way, so when you're talking to other curators, who call themselves curators, when you're talking about Kiesler for example, or you're talking about Herbert Bayer or even maybe El Lissitzky to a lesser extent, but even the idea of Duchamp as a curator is a very, very recent concept. I think that as well as producing this discourse around the history of the relationship between Barr and the production of modernism or modernity from an American perspective, it offers an alternative history of the role that all these European emigrants played in the production of modernism and modernity and specifically the evolution of innovative display practices and the beginnings of interdisciplinarity within modern and contemporary art. I think that's where it becomes really interesting for you know, an influential, as a publication, in terms of bringing those aspects of their practice to the fore.

MAS: No, it was a manifesto for a different, actually before that I was teaching, now I'm in a very interdisciplinary programme and I've always taught a very different kind of modern art history. I was really emphasising the avant-garde. From 1930 on, artistic practice was a spectrum of possibilities, with dominant culture continually forgetting the more avant-garde or art into everyday life element of that spectrum or configuration or constellation, whatever you want to, whatever metaphor you want to use. I always use a spectrum of possibilities because it's a bit linear, but it kind of works for me, and even my work as a teacher was again a kind of manifesto, a very, very aggressive attempt to rewrite or present artistic practice in terms of these options and different from a lot of

people who associated with more conceptual or political practice. I totally feel that abstract painting is just as valid as the most effective political activist type of work. It's just whether the eloquence of expression is appropriate for the piece and so I was very aware of trying to rewrite this history in terms of bringing those other practices and saying they were just as valid, almost to the point where, Bayer and those leading figures were saying, oh, you know, exhibition design is my most important work or that El Lissitzky thought it was the most important, and then here in the States there was a kind of prejudice against Barr, you know, was he a Nazi, was he, you know, or how you would say, how dubious was his politics? Well, Gropius exhibited in these Nazi shows, I mean, Mies would have, I think, been a Nazi if you let him. I think you acknowledge that they did do certain work on spec, but there was a very, a very crude binary view of the world that I grew up in, in the eighties, in terms of post-modernism. They were separating the sheep from the goats, the conceptual post-modernists from the crude expressionist post-modernists, anyone who had, you know, they seem to be able to see the world in this Cold War black and white, which still haunts me, there are all these new books, new media, old media, I can't believe, the key to the most subtle so-called post-modernist critics like Benjamin Buchloh was calling David Salle a fascist because he painted more conservatively. I mean literally, get a grip here. Now it's new media, old media, it's a very, very, all my work is critiquing this black and white racist view of the world, you're a Caucasian, you're African American, you're you know, it's this way of dividing, even politically I can go into that, that was the problem with George Bush - he was thinking in a Cold War binary universe, he couldn't think in terms of a terrorist distributed notion of power, and so, I'm going into my new way of thinking but, my new work, but anyway, getting back to your question about the binary, I can't remember where I went, I took us everywhere, even into George Bush's brain! I'm sorry, I live in the US and he's my President and he's haunting me! [Laughs]

PON: I can see that! You were talking about the spectrum of possibilities in relation to the avant-garde from the 1930s onwards.

MAS: And I always, I've been trying to, I'm a revisionist historian in a way. I have this other activity which has given me my pay cheque, where I teach and always that's been a characteristic of my way of seeing, ever since I really became a little bit more mature as a scholar.

PON: Well I think that, by calling yourself a revisionist historian, there is also a discursive shift or realignment which you could call radical in what *The Power of Display* has produced. For me, and for numerous people who've actually read it, its importance lies in its ability to erase this populist notion that contemporary curatorial practice has not just started in the last twenty, twenty five years.

MAS: I don't get any of this.

PON: Your reasons for writing it were perhaps not to offer a critique of current curatorial discourse, but it is actually a critique of this notion of the curator as a creative spirit, as an individualistic modern subject, because as your book exposes, these exhibitions were very collaborative affairs - especially with artists and designers curatorially involved - but it also highlights the fact that artists were always working as curators from within their own practice.

MAS: I'm not sure that it is a critique of the curator or it is, I would prefer them to be creative in their practice but there are ways that you do it, you know, there's a spectrum of possibilities for curation. A lot of the people who you are mentioning, people who are doing creative curation, sometimes people complain that it becomes too much, just about, the work gets manipulated, in the curator's vision. People complain about that. To my mind there's a

spectrum of possibilities for curation, where the curator's voice is much lower and autonomy of the objects is much louder, to use oral metaphors, and then there are others where the works become almost illustrations for curatorial ideas, and I have no problems with either one of them. What I want is more of a spectrum of possibilities for curation where you have, let's say, what might be considered a more traditional show that was hung and inflected in a very intelligent way, that allows for individual voices to speak or to let an artist, an individual artist, do something, and I would like more strong curatorial essays, where it's like a text essay, where there's a message, where there's an idea. I'm in Manhattan where the museums are absolutely afraid to do a thematic show and it's been left to the smaller, less economically endowed institutions to struggle, to articulate.

PON: There is a dominant accepted notion that the idea of the curator as a creative spirit, as a meta-artist, shall we say, has been borne out of the proliferation of large scale, international temporary, biennial style exhibitions happening on a global scale, over the last, say, twenty years. Obviously, the number of those has increased greatly, like in 2003, 2002, there were over fifty. The involvement of certain international curators in numerous, many of those biennials, within different countries, obviously produces a kind of a visibility for those curators that they wouldn't have achieved, say, thirty, forty years ago, where you would curate one show over a three year period, for example, if you were working on that level. So I think that, for example, a lot of the language that someone like El Lissitzky or Kiesler would have used and the notion of transformativity, the notion of the exhibition as an evolutionary construct, the notion of flexibility, the notion of taking works away from the wall, you know, hanging them on mobile structures, the idea of the possibility of design, exhibition design, as a means to produce, or as a means to accommodate many, many artists within the same space, while at the same time enabling a certain level of interactivity on behalf of the spectator, the

viewer, the audience, whatever term you use, the visitor, shall we say. But these are, you know, they're existing paradigms within curatorial practice. But this is the same language that is also being used, predominantly within recent curatorial projects and the idea of the exhibition as having no permanent space, constantly mobile, ever-changing, interactive and on the move. What your book does, inadvertently is to highlight a kind of amnesia within contemporary curatorial discourse towards these innovations of the past, which disables the belief that these types of innovations are a recent phenomenon. Inadvertently I mean there is a kind of a critique because obviously people such as Obrist appear to be working in a vacuum, for example, and if any curator is working in a vacuum, and that vacuum happens to be producing a particular concept or perception of themselves through the use of a vernacular, or through the use of an empowered position, and if that language has a precedent, or has a precursor, the outing of that precursor actually undoes, to a certain extent, the originality or the empowered system of production that these curators are using. The link between the past and the present exposes these machinations.

MAS: Yea. I, OK, initially I was not thinking of a critique of that kind of practice per se, and a lot of that hyperactivity, this was a book that was conceived much earlier, these books take so long, it was like an eighties idea, really completed in the early nineties, but the formulation was like '87, the whole outline which is exactly what I produced. That's how I think. I actually prefer curators trying - the thing about the curators that you're mentioning is at least they're aware of the fact that their work has creative power and that their sites carry ideological, carry these dimensions that ninety nine percent of the curators or people who hang a show are completely oblivious to, so whether they're doing this as effectively or as a dialogue or somehow the way these configurations of culture get manipulated, a lot of this stuff gets to be very trendy, and to really, you know, how effective is the engagement and does it become nearly a game, like a chess game or

something. How effective are the formulations they're coming up with, there's another question but they're just at least at stage one for me where they're aware of the fact that creating new installation is creative, carries certain power and creates subjects, which, I'm just grateful that at least they're acknowledging it to a certain degree, and let's say someone like an Obrist might be more self-consciously related to that more than a Szeemann, might not have that kind of language and then the next critique and I think this may be where you're going with your work. OK, so what can we do to engage this discourse so that it truly is an effective practice, because a lot of those shows fail, I think, I haven't seen a lot of them, but I'm sensing that these shows fail, OK, I mean …

PON: They don't fail in the press release, they don't fail in the catalogue essay, they don't fail, and they fail in the experience.

MAS: And so how do you do that? I think a lot of the leading curators who are doing the big international exhibitions, not like the most effective ones, which I haven't seen, and I didn't travel, so I didn't see a lot of those shows, OK, not for lack of interest, just for practical, personal circumstances.

PON: Have you met or talked to many contemporary curators operating in this field?

MAS: Of the US ones, Obrist is the only one I know, he brought me over for a talk and the other ones I've just heard about, I had a long talk with Okwui Enwezor. Catherine David I don't know, I just don't know those people, I'm not in that discourse so much, I'm just more aware of it. But I think a lot of these shows, the ones I know that don't work, are the ones where you have these five A-list curators, and they go to Istanbul, Venice, Sao Paulo and they choose the same top twenty artists who come in and do sometimes site specific, or non-site specific installation and we have these

clones, these internationalist curators and their artist clones, you know, it's like not too many links. Sometimes there's a slight tether to make it localised, the kind of globalised localised situation and that glocalisation could work but I'm sensing it doesn't necessarily work. Some of them work more than others. I think the South Africa Biennale, there was one year I did a survey of these for *Artforum* and the 'Johannesburg Biennale' seemed to have worked better then, it had more local sub-sets that were engaging with the situation. And I remember that one, I didn't go, but it was more engaged with the site, so I think that a lot of these people are on to something, but it's like how do you create meaning, how do you create effective curatorial practice with that consciousness, and I feel that we need that next leap, and I haven't, unfortunately I'm literally handicapped because I haven't seen these shows and had I seen them, I'm sure I could come up with some formulations and suggestions.

PON: Well, say from a local perspective, being in New York, being an American, being an academic and a writer and someone who's actually, in 1987, decided to write, to consider writing this publication, there were obviously local as well as global or international reasons for you to do that, but at the same time there must have been artists, practitioners, other curators working in the late eighties who you were aware of who also had similar ideas or similar kinds of anxieties or similar ideological positions in relation to the history of art and the necessity for critique.

MAS: I'm thinking about right now because I'm thinking of the 'Whitney Biennial', because the 'Whitney Biennial' right now is a joke to me, it's an escapist biennial, it's a big white box with all work that does not engage with a handful, with anything political or social so much and there's not, nothing has to do that, it should have just been a total escapist biennial, there's like one party room that really works and there was another exhibition recently at the Whitney, which I thought was a good attempt, called the

'American Effect', dealing with globalisation and, the installation, it was just, there was no consideration that there might even be a discourse, even though I support the Whitney, particularly here in New York, for even taking a theme like that and so, I think in the Biennial, I remember one Biennial, I don't remember what year it was, and I know a lot of us had problems with it, but I remember Group Material was given one project room and they infiltrated it with all the people who were left out and they dealt with, it might have been an AIDS timeline, or something, it was, they inflected it with all the things that we felt had been left out. So by, under their signature, this one room was called 'Americana'. I thought that was a terrific example of how there was a kind of problematic group show, one of the individuals, one of the individual groups or one of the invitees actually was a wedge that reconfigured the show and allowed a kind of vital energy to exist almost as a cell that infiltrated and I don't want to use a negative pathology, that somehow infected the rest of the show. So Group Material was a group that I was very engaged with, I did one project with them, I always respected their work, as an artist whose work I mentioned before, Antonio Muntadas has always thought of institutions, and actually one of my early projects was that I was going through the archives to look at his exhibition installation which was this spare installation just about lighting and frames, it was a very poetic piece. You know, there were other artists that were giving the notions of the self an identity, you know, it was all the Pictures people, Cindy Sherman, Barbara Krueger, this was a very, a US centered art world view, but these were the people whose work was highly visible, that you know, that identity has been constructed. Adrian Piper also, her work was, her work had a lot of impact, and these are all people I've written, at least small, little catalogue essays for or knew or engaged in discourse with, so there were people like Deborah Katz, a friend of mine who deals with gender, issues of sexuality, lesbian identity, so it was friends and colleagues. General Idea, their entire project was a mini Art Room system, you know even starting with Art Metropole and then I did a

collaboration with Hans Haacke in a magazine where we tried to infiltrate the magazine with one of his projects and he was thinking in terms of art systems. I collaborated with a number of them, when I write an essay, I view it is a collaboration, I write it in a very different way, I, together with the person, and I shape it to what their concerns are, I don't write it in a typical critic, the way a critic would. In fact, in Antonio Muntadas' piece 'Between the Frames', there is a part where she says she hates the term critic, because it's almost an adversarial term and I absolutely abhor the model of criticism that has presided where you have to say, that this is, you know, good work and bad work or, and again I lived through this model where you separated the good post-modernism from the bad post-modernism, and this Cold War binary, ironically the people who were bring post-structualism were taking this binary approach to criticism, so I don't view it as criticism but of course I do make value judgments, but when I do these artists' catalogues, which is primarily what I have done, in fact even I've been trying to do this other work, but a friend asked me to do this, I can't sort of, it's a personal relationship to the person and the work and I write very differently and we sit down and we talk and talk and I try to, in a very site specific way, write an essay that is in dialogue with that particular catalogue or their particular interests, they ask me, all of them, all the artists have asked me, so why were they interested in asking me, what were their concerns, and we kind of collaboratively go forward in terms of issues, and it's a very different way of writing, it's completely different, I write differently for each context and the artist essay is written completely differently from any other work that I do. It's a collaborative venture.

PON: What do you mean by collaborative?

MAS: In that, yes, I'm the writer and the author, but the framework for some of the questions, or the intentions and the purpose, the function of the essay, is generated from what the artist is

interested in having discussed, or what issues they may feel has been alighted. Now I'm not going to talk about the artist, 'oh I really feel my work is about the blue sky and I think it's about the deep sea'. I'm not going to do that, but it really comes out of a, usually tape, like you're taping me, extensive discussion, and I do the transcript and then I go back and I shape it into a dialogue with the individual body of work and the individual and the particular project that they've asked me to participate in. Whereas with other essays, it's totally my thing, my framework, my idea, my agenda, my manifesto, and with artist essays, I write it in a much more give and take thing, and see if, on occasion, I've turned round and said 'something is missing, I'd love some kind of explication of this area' and I will, I've never disagreed, really, it's just oh, you know, there's been a hole here, and can you do anything with this, we'll have that, and so, I'll respond to that issue. So it's a different way of writing. It's coming out of a dialogue.

PON: In relation to the number of people that you've mentioned from that period that were working proactively, and also had similar ideas around institutional critique, in terms of the development of their practice since then, how significant do you think the development of curatorial practice is in relation to what they're doing now?

MAS: It depends on the person. I mentioned Muntadas because I think his work really continues, he's doing the *On Translation* series and he's literally dealing with curatorial issues of translation in the various museums and sites and he is very, very, very self-conscious and engaged. He won't say curatorial practice but it's embedded in his entire practice. He does talk about the curator, but yea, he's just completely aware of the site specific, institutional specific, the creative individual contribution to each installation. Hans Haacke, I haven't seen him for years but I presume he's continuing with pieces I see here and there but I haven't had a discussion with him. Julie Ault, I do have a very strong dialogue with her, and

she's actually publishing, she's just come out with all these books, two books last year, dealing with curation as a creative practice, she feels she needs to do publications because there's a need to bring this together, and she's actually gone off now and separated from Group Material and works with Martin Beck on installation design as one of her practices, and we've talked about these issues, and you know, she's very, very much engaged now in teaching.

PON: Is she teaching within a curatorial course?

MAS: It's in Switzerland and I'm not quite sure, she's told me a little bit about it, I think it's more of an art school context but it deals with her work. Someone like AA Bronson is still thinking about curation, doing very different kinds of shows now that he's kind of a single practitioner. Barbara Krueger I see less of. I'm trying to think, Dennis Adams, also, I'm less engaged with, again, I've been working now so much more in this intermedia thing. So it depends, I'm trying to think, the curation, oh, how can I say, like the most obvious thing is the thing you forget. I'm in constant dialogue daily with the Exit Art, with Papa Colo and Jeanette Ingermann and really that's my institutional link in terms of an organisation and their entire practice has been engaged with the power of display, the power of the catalogue, the power of the invitation, and they often show me their texts and you know, so that's a constant dialogue. I don't influence their shows, I'm more of a sounding board, and I'm on their Board.

PON: What year did they take over Exit Art?

MAS: They founded it in I think 1981'ish, I have all of this somewhere.

PON: I mean it just seems that it was quite curious that you said it was 1987 and it seems to me that people like Group Material were the reason why I started curating as part of my practice as an

artist, but it also in '87, it was the year that the Whitney Independent Study Programme established a separate curating component when Hal Foster took over and when it became independent from the museum. It was also in '87 that Le Magasin in Grenoble opened up the first post-graduate course in curating in Europe. So there is a late eighties zeitgeist thing going on there which I'm currently trying to understand, and that's why the beginning of the period that I'm looking at is 1987 onwards, in terms of the production of a critical discourse around curating.

MAS: '87, a lot of us were reacting to the political situation. In the seventies, you know they say the sixties, but the sixties for a lot of people was really what was happening in the seventies, because the sixties we were used to wearing mod clothes and were a lot more conservative. There was a lot, when I first came to New York, there was a lot of site specific, more political, there was a devolving of the political and the rising of the market. I even traced down the rising, there wasn't a photo market, and we really get a political, social aesthetic retrenchment in the age, literally we get Ronald Reagan as President, we get the rebirth of the market, and really the beginning of a contemporary market for really contemporary work, like Julian Schnabel, there was a Schnabel sale in '83, it was a very, very, very conservative moment, here in the US. It was the era of Reagan and Thatcher, it was the greed is good decade, it was the new establishment moment, it was where politics was boring, many people were trying to keep it going, but we were, there was a kind of foreclosure of a lot of the diversity of practice that had resided in the teens, or in the sixties and seventies, and there was a return to the object, which is fine but it was a return to the object with a, it was aggressive and it was polarised, that was why there was the good post-modern and the bad post-modernism and it was, there was the culture wars, we had extreme conservatism, you know, on civil rights issues and in the eighties. When I was coming up with, like '87, '89, I just wanted to be an activist, I wanted to go into human rights, basically,

ultimately, and by '89 I was completely formulated but I had to write all these books, so I was almost done with art history by '89, to tell you the truth. So it was an extreme moment in terms of women's rights, political rights, aesthetical issues, and there was a way that a number of us, I think, were focusing on the system, trying to make sense of what was going on, I think that was pushing some of the articulations of self consciousness to open up or remember these other practices because the dominant discourse, the dominant institutions of power as emphasising a much more conservative end of the spectrum, and I think that dynamic led to a lot of really crude theorisation, I really hate that early 'post' argument that I keep repeating, which I wish I was more powerful, because I don't, I don't think people quite get it. And I mean, I could take this through longer, what's the use, it just doesn't, and anyway, I think there was a need to start bringing a lot of these issues and ideas of certain kinds of practices into some kind of institutional setting or some kind of manifesto, like mine I view as a manifesto, to make an argument against certain conditions that were presiding. The eighties really becomes a hyper-moment of this amnesia and forgetting, even though people are trying to remember.

PON: I mean that's why there are also all these post-colonial studies readers in the eighties. I'm not saying that people weren't writing about post-colonial issues, but it really becomes an academic subject within universities in the eighties, late eighties actually, then the late eighties was also the birth of museology, the idea of museum as a pluralistic object of study and it's also the new birth of historiography, and the idea of alternative histories, where memory becomes a space of contestation of history.

MAS: Yea, and you're absolutely right, and I'm thinking in the trajectories of history, different layers of institutions, it wasn't until the post-war era you start getting more post-graduate study in art school. And really the building of these various institutions, but if we really think about it, we really don't have the modern

museum till '29, right? We had these other kinds of collecting museums that are more colonialist or completely historical. We start getting the modern museum. We don't really even get ethnographic art till the twenties and thirties, right? We had, it was all exotica, if we really start thinking historically these objects of study, contemporary art, ethnographic art, the professionalisation of the artist, comes I think more in the post-war era, there were always teaching schools, but really it becomes integrated into the universities, there are always the exceptional institutions but I guess it's mostly a post-war phenomenon. So each is building on the other and if we're looking at the various discourses, we have the amateur collector then we finally get the museum and then the professionalisation in terms of schooling and then in the sixties and seventies, there's a proliferation of that, and then the eighties there's this other level of professionalisation. I'm trying to think what it's really linking with, on other levels culturally, at that level of professionlisation that I associate with the eighties.

END OF TAPE

POLLY STAPLE

London, 10-02-06

PAUL O'NEILL: Do you think the term 'independent curator' is problematic in relation to the idea of curating outside or beyond an institutional post?

POLLY STAPLE: Yes, because I always think the term 'independent' instantly begs the question independent of what? If we're talking curatorially, I think there's a mythical idea of the independent curator, and that independence is this autonomous zone, an idealised state, but for anyone who gets involved in working on any kind of project, particularly in curatorial production, particuarly if you are involved in production, it's an entirely collaborative exercise. I don't mean collaborative in a theoretical faux-relational aesthetics sense. Rather in a basic, a practical way, you have to work with a team of people to get projects of scale done.

When young curators start out - and I still think this is ongoing, even with curating schools - you have no visibility, you have no profile, and so often built into what you're doing, is a level and an idea of independence. You're independent of visible power structures and so you do projects which are funded off your own back, you do them with your friends, and you do them in your kitchen or you find a space, and so you're independent of the established structures of communication in the art world. But what is also built into that process is that you want to become visible. So you attain a level of visibility through doing these projects, and then you're within a system of dialogue and communication and power and everything that that involves, and then you apply to the Arts Council for a grant for five thousand pounds or whatever, to do your project, and then you're not independent... I always find it curious when people say that they're doing 'independent projects', but they're funded by the Arts Council.

There are notions of independence in relation to the public funded sphere and in relation to the market, the commercial sphere. The word independent then comes into play, which is again problematic, self-governing would perhaps be a more appropriate term. In relation to your question about independent curators working within institutions, I think it's more a matter of 'co-dependence'. A lot of the more renowned curators, who are often described as independent curators, if you look, and you don't have to look very hard, they're affiliated to

institutions. Yet those institutions allow them to do external projects, because it's a mutually beneficial exercise. Often I wonder how they manage to do all those projects, and I assume a lot of those curators are extremely adept at delegating. Sometimes that level of delegation is problematic, because there are different levels of success.

PON: You studied History of Art and then went on to do a Fine Art degree in Goldsmiths. What led you towards curating as your practice and what was your first curatorial project?

PS: I have an art history background, and I have a fine art background. I have two sides to my brain: one which tends to academia and reflexiveness and is the writing side of my brain perhaps, and the other which is very much about production and action, and not being reflexive, rather in the moment. Being a curator you have to have both of these parts working.

When I was studying fine art at Goldsmiths, I made video work, but I also ended up staging events. The work I made immediately after I left college, when I was figuring out what I was doing also involved working collaboratively and staging events. I was also editing a magazine. I had been working as a reviews editor at *Untitled* while I was at college and then I became co-editor of the magazine. I'd always been interested in commentary and criticism, but then I was also interested in producing work. The work that I produced involved arranging events, which involved bringing other people in and organising these events. So this naturally led into thinking about curation, and then organising a few shows, and then Cubitt happened. Doing Cubitt was the first time I then felt 'I am a curator', this is what I do.

But what is interesting in relation to young curators now, when I was at college, when I was studying art history and when I was also at Goldsmiths studying fine art, and this is in the late '80s through to '96, it was never a career option to be a curator. We never discussed curating or curators at Goldsmiths. I imagine at Goldsmiths now, there is a lot of discussion about curators, and I imagine there are people who are on a fine art course or an art history course, and they think, well actually this is a career option or this is a defined job that I

would like to go into.

PON: Even when the MA in Curating at Goldsmiths was there during this time?

PS: At that point we weren't involved with that course and curating just wasn't our field of interest. Maybe some people were, but I think it was the very early beginnings. I left Goldsmiths in '96 and maybe that's interesting, because it was a crossover point. When I was at Goldsmiths it was a really interesting period - '93 to '96 - it was when Damien Hirst at al were all the rage, so there was this focus on Goldsmiths and a spotlight suddenly on the London art world. In fact that's when the 'London art world' started to be talked about in a particular way and that was the first time we encountered contemporary art in that way, going to openings or seeing shows by the so called yBas. These artists were also our tutors. Liam Gillick was one of the tutors at college then, and he was very young, not long out of college himself. The best thing he did was organise the visiting artist lectures every week, any artist who was in town he'd drag them down to New Cross. Those lectures were one of the best things about that course.

I'm digressing, so the first project that I made with a curatorial hat on was taking a show to an artist-run space in Sydney, Australia. I'd already organised shows with friends, but in this instance I was inviting some people who were beyond my immediate London peer group. That was probably the first time I was approaching artists I didn't know and so going into a very different contract with people. I got some British Council money, and it was a mixture of London and Glasgow artists: Gary Webb, Gareth Jones, Hilary Lloyd, Victoria Morton, Adam Chodzko, Eva Rothschild... It was called 'The Seat with the Clearest View', and it was a great show.

PON: Do you think there are particular reasons or any particular moments that are significant in developing this idea of curating as a potential future employment for practitioners? Do you think the art has changed or do you think the curating has changed or the art practice or do you think that the educational relationship between those two positions has changed?

PS: It's a really complex situation, but it's predominantly about the expansion of the art world, and that is all relating to: on the one side say, global communication systems and on another level it's to do with say, the expansion of leisure time. Tate Modern obviously being a prime example of a new type of art space catering to and shaping the new art experience. Then there's a trickle down effect to smaller spaces, and more people wanting to be artists and more people in education and more art spaces demanding more people to work in them... And there's also the shift in art production itself. If you're a painter you work fairly straightforwardly in a studio with your canvases even if you may have assistants etc. If you're an artist who's making films however you always need an entire production crew. A lot of the artists that I work with and the artists that I'm interested in, often work in ways in which they need very clear support from me as the curator. And my role as curator is quite clearly defined as, you know, everything from fundraiser, organiser, administrator, promoter, editor, director but also often camera person or rather assistant camera person! And it's not just about going and having a studio visit and picking the work. You're a producer as much as a director.

PON: There has been an unprecedented interest in contemporary art curation in the last fifteen, twenty years. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during that period, and are there any dominant forms of curatorial practice that may have emerged or that you could identify?

PS: Development of technology engendering the shifts in medium to moving image being a clear one. How people experience art shifting in relation to new spaces where art is encountered, so you take on board different aspects in terms of thinking about how you make a show. Thinking about how people experience going to art galleries or experience art outside of art galleries, is defining in terms of art being in public spaces. Obviously there's a whole theoretical dialogue centering around relational aesthetics, which is totally key to all of this, and represents the biggest shift in terms of the form of the art produced.

PON: In terms of your own practice, how would you describe your

curatorial practice as distinct from that of others?

PS: It is key that I work collaboratively with artists. There are certain artists that I have ongoing relationships with. For example I work with Aleksandra Mir a lot, we have an ongoing relationship with a biannual publication *Living & Loving* that we make. Our roles are very clearly defined: I'm the curator and Aleksandra is the artist, but the project arises from a constant dialogue between ourselves. You can't unpack either of us from the process of production. I could make a book of interviews with another artist but it wouldn't be the same thing. Aleksandra could find someone else to manage an interview project, but it's not about that. And the collaborative relationship is very precious to both of us, and in terms of definition, how I define my practice and how she defines her practice of working with people.

Actually I should bring up printed matter. Print is key to everything that I've done, from working in - and the relationship between writing and making and producing material for, and how art is disseminated and through what networks. I'm always involved in production. When I get asked to do lectures, I do a lecture called 'Production'. I don't think it's uncommon necessarily, but with 'Frieze', which has been defining for me for the past four years, working with what is now called Frieze Projects, is it's all coming from a commissioning situation. Recently I realised that I haven't made a traditional exhibition in years. In a way, it would be a nice thing to do. I always think the closest model to my practice is film production, where you're commissioning a project and you have to bring together a number of forces in order to get that project made.

For the past four years I've been working in an extremely unique situation and it has been great, but it has its difficulties. Of course the factors which make this situation extremely difficult are also the elements which make it great. It would be great to have some walls at least to start with sometimes. But then I have developed my own framework using other factors, the fair for example has a very particular temporal framework... But I would say the defining elements of my practice would be an attitude to production, working collaboratively, and a particular awareness of how the work is distributed and disseminated.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making. How do you see your role as a curator within that and at what level of artistic production do you see your practice being involved within the process of art making?

PS: I see my role as curator and being creative in that role as absolutely key. I don't choose to label it so heavily as some people do, because I don't think it's necessary. For me that's a whole question about ownership which I think is really interesting in terms generally of how people feel the need to label what they do. It's important to define your practice, but sometimes over-labeling can get carried away. It's like the practice is this hollow thing that falls behind.

I've always been interested in artists, artwork and theoretical positions which are in between categories, that actively elide categorisation. The world is more complicated than a straightforward black and white situation. So I actively seek that out in the artists that I work with, and the ideas that I'm interested in. It's often more messy and complicated that way, but that also brings up good debate and ideas.

It's crucial that my position is also defined as a curatorial role. It's not a discussion of 'are curators artists?' or 'are artists curators?' It's about the fact that the term curator is a strong, positive term, it's not a negative term, it's a term, which is maybe increasingly seen more clearly defined as having an actively creative role.

PON: One of the key objects to emerge in the 1990s in relation to curatorial practice is the expansion of biennials or biennales, both kind of large ones and those on the periphery, so called periphery, and one could say that the second part of that expansion was the kind of the change within biennials to include things like events, discussions, performances and events before and after the actual exhibition itself. So therefore the biennial transcends the exhibition somehow. And that's something that's quite evident in your programme at Cubitt and

also extremely evident in what you're doing with Frieze Projects. It's a double sided question: one is do you think that art fairs, because of their visibility and also their scale now have replaced the biennials in some way, and secondly do you think that art fairs have appropriated those mechanisms for discussion and dissemination that biennials kind of second place, like discussions, events, etcetera?

PS: The first question being have art fairs replaced biennials? Art fairs and biennials are two very distinct entities. The heart of an art fair is that it's an art fair, which involves galleries selling work. It's a commercial market place. I read an interview with Okwui Enwezor recently in *Bidoun* and he is really articulate about why biennials are important: because it's an opportunity to create an essay of ideas, to make a proposal. But what's interesting is that art fairs come up in relation to this conversation although in his argument he's very clearly making a distinction between biennials and museum or gallery exhibition spaces. I don't think people are really doing it so much anymore but there was a point about two years ago where people were really moaning about biennials. And the biennial model hadn't managed to shift itself, people were really moaning about themed shows and big group shows and that they weren't satisfying. But the biennial model is now entering a really sophisticated moment, possibly informed by art fairs and having to redefine themselves, all these formats defining themselves in relation to each other. People are starting to realise that this biennial space is the only place where you can set up a theoretical, you can set out ideas in a new framework and it can change and it can alter, because actually contemporary museums and exhibition spaces have very key demands which don't allow them to shift and alter the format or framework. I know biennials will obviously have key demands but it feels like there's more ability to play around with everything from venue, to how you choose to spend the budget, to the timeframe. Also the fact that as a curator, you're given a lot of time to produce a project, this is really key. If you're running a regular programme, and you are a dependent curator, let's say, you have to have a constant programme running. When then do you get clear research time? The important generative factor of biennials is that often the curator is employed with comprehensive research time to really develop a proposal. Curatorially that's the really crucial feature of the biennial. We could go into the funding structures behind biennials

which are always tied in with the state, urban regeneration, tourism etc and what impact the biennial has and what the curator has to deal with re. marketing and everything to do with that, which is also redefined each time, whereas in a regular gallery space it's not.
I think your first question is have art fairs replaced biennials? and I would say that they are two very distinct things, obviously. Now, in my experience working for the past four years with an art fair, founding and running the public programme, the curated programme of the art fair, when I was first thinking about what that programme could be - in fact I wasn't looking at biennial models as such, it was looking at key defining features in the art fair which are mainly to do with temporality. The art fair is only on for five days, and so what becomes important are levels of intense impact, and what can you make within that timeframe? That comes down to whether you can build things physically, or whether actually you can have a discussion and whether the fair's a better environment for that. There are elements in the programme that I run which you could see in a biennial. But, what I find interesting about the situation that I find myself in, is that it is an *art fair*. The art fair sets a particular tone to the event, and you can choose to knock against that, or work with that and it gives ability to do very particular things. Actually the 'Frieze Art Fair' has been pretty unique in setting an agenda of thinking about these things.

PON: What about 'Arco'?

PS: It's not new to do projects at art fairs, and 'Arco' for example has a pretty thorough programme of talks, but do you know who curates Arco? That's the thing, the self-reflexive criticality is key. So, the second question, part of this question was about ...?

PON: About appropriating strategies associated with biennials, like discussions, events, which is only actually to my mind quite a recent thing within biennials, in any way, since biennials have become kind of somewhat politicised within critical theory.

PS: How long would you put on that period?

PON: 'Documenta X' in 1997 would probably be the obvious beginning of

all that. It is the moment where the relationship between discourse and practice becomes more pronounced within a large-scale exhibition in Europe certainly.

PS: I wonder if it's a matter of 'appropriating'? When I think about programming I never look at the biennial model and think 'oh I'll take that, copy that'. It's as much about looking at academic models of symposiums just as much as looking at film festivals and thinking how film festivals work. It is about looking at biennials in terms of - I mean there are overlaps, but what I've had to do at 'Frieze' is work with extremely specific circumstances, and you use those to make the work, it's all about time and place.

PON: Is it slightly parasitic, does it feed off existing models? All the curated projects also work parasitically in relation to the central exhibition, which is the fair itself.

PS: Yes. What's the relationship, the defining relationship between the projects and talks programme and the fair? I've had many conversations about this, like is the market place benefiting from the programme's intellectual credibility? Or is the less economically buoyant, intellectual, artistic side, or indeed the kind of art which doesn't sell so easily in a conservative market place, does that work actually benefit from the fact that it can be present at this event? The economics of the art fair, my art fair situation with the public programme is very, very complicated, and a lot of people don't realise how complicated it is. People really tend to take the art fair at face value and they project a lot of assumptions onto that complex situation. Although probably a lot of people don't realise how complicated it probably is running the economic situation in an institution like Tate or Camden Arts Centre. People don't often really stop and think about how work gets produced and shown.

PON: One of the criticisms that has been directed towards the 'Frieze Art Fair' discussion programme is that it behaves as an afterthought, kind of an add on to the main event, and also because it's appropriating a strategy that's associated with so called 'critical' structures like biennials. My argument against that critique would be that if you to Venice or you go to 'Documenta' you're not going to stay

there for the duration of four, five months, so therefore you're probably going to miss the talks. With the 'Frieze Art Fair' you've got five days, you could potentially sit in all the discussions, so therefore your actual accessibility is at a greater level, even though the list of people may be the same, provokes discussions within a very different context. Perhaps the questions are different, and maybe the audiences are also different, in terms of their own kind of criticality, or their own critical position. How would you respond to that criticism?

PS: It's like Ribbons and Bells. You see, I always find it really difficult to respond. I like your answer to the question, and I would agree with that. I find it really boring and retrograde and I think it comes from a really conservative position and actually quite naïve position when people come with that argument. All I can talk from is experience. When you look at square footage in the art fair, the main event is the gallery booths, and so the discussion, the talks, the cinema, and the projects they are often arranged round the edge, that's a fact. Even if there is a large-scale artists' project placed centrally, it's still not the main event. To me this is really clear, and that's really fine. The programme brings in this other level, and what I find really interesting and exciting is that it *is* in this market. And this context obviously shapes how I think about programming in a way that is critically important - last year for example on the Saturday, we had a series of talks, which were really quite art historical, academic. If you'd gone to the same programme of talks at Tate, they would have had a very different spin. Because it's Tate and all that that entails in terms of the museum, they would have been more academic maybe, but within the fair the context is all defining, and it didn't mean that they weren't absolutely heavyweight talks and intellectually critical, but because there's something about coming out of the auditorium into an art fair, that gives a framing device on what you've just heard. I find it interesting creatively to think about this very particular context, that's what it always comes from and I would hope that active thinking translates to the audience. A parasitical situation is where the parasite is leeching onto the bigger organism but the bigger organism also needs the parasite in order to survive. The two feed off each other.

There are lots of economical ins and outs to do with the programme and how it's funded. We receive core funding from the European Union Culture 2000 and we receive money from the Arts Council of England all of which was applied to, it's not a given. Plus we have to raise extra funds for certain projects. We also get some in kind support from the art fair, from the marketing and to a certain extent space rental. It's also clear that because I work in an art fair, I have a particular attitude to the market - I'm not a communist. I think something particular to this country as well is the issue of public private partnership. We're in the middle of a very particular socio-economic situation and you have to find a way to work through that, and find good and meaningful ways to work within this structure. The line these days between complicity and resistance is not only thin but relational. A lot of people sit around going, the market is a bad, evil place, and my attitude has always been, look, we're all involved in this in some way, and you have to find a way to work within this. That's not a defeatist attitude, it's really not that at all, it's just that I don't think any of this is defined yet, we're right in the middle of it at this moment.

PON: How do you think, in terms of the three 'Frieze Art Fairs', how do you think they have changed and how do you think that they've accommodated shifts or changes that have taken place within the relationship between market and curatorial practice in the last three to four years?

PS: My programme which works in a very particular way, and the fact that we've had the Wrong Gallery involved too, and the particular event time of the art fair and this atmosphere of euphoria that you have in an art fair is very particular, and means you can make certain works in that environment. Art fairs do have a currency right now, and so that means that a lot of these kind of works are getting attention, but they're not the only works and this in not the only place to see that kind of work.

PON: One of your responses in the *Pilot* publication in 2005, as to why we should go to art fairs, and you just said that your reasons for going was 'research', which was a very clear position.

PS: It's true, and when I go to other art fairs, I do not go there expecting to have the same experience that I would going to a more regular gallery or to a biennial. I go there as an art professional, I go there to meet people, if they have good talks then I would go and listen to the talks, to see particular works perhaps - at an art fair my attention span is working in a very particular way, and you can check things in an art fair. It's about audience, that's quite a key thing, because an art fair is traditionally a professional event for other professionals, but that's one of the really interesting things that's changing. It's like, oh, hold on a minute, does anyone ever stop and ask the galleries what they think about the fact that there's now this huge general audience coming to their professional event? This general audience who are not buying work and they're not involved in the level of curatorial discussion that we're having today, this general audience are interested in seeing what's going on and they're interested in art and finding out about these things, and that's one of the key shifts. At the moment I'm going into the fourth year, and I'm thinking a lot about differences between core audience and general audience. That's maybe one of the interesting things about art fairs in contrast to biennials where you have fellow professionals who are there, but international, they're there very much to meet people, speak to specific galleries, meet other people who are in town to make some research, people who are *trading* information and things and then there are people who are - and some general audience who are looking because this is a totally new experience, and what are they, how are they experiencing this event and when I programme the talks, and certainly the cinema, I have to address at what level I'm pitching at? Right from the beginning, there was always the intention of including many people and drawing in as many people as possible, and now four years on with my side of the programme, what I find interesting right now is actually it's about focusing on a core audience.

PON: People who are buying tickets or the people who are getting them in the post?

PS: It is a combination of the two. The art fair attracts, on the one hand, people who maybe go to the Serpentine - it's in Hyde Park we're in Regent's Park - maybe go to the Serpentine Gallery on a Sunday every now and then, or they go to Tate Modern sometimes. There's lot of buzz

around 'Frieze' so it's become this event to go and see. A lot of people aren't looking at art, but that's not a bad thing - people go to Tate Modern to look at it as a building because it's how the architecture of modern space is being so defined. Then at the other end of the scale, you have a very sophisticated art professional, and whether they're a collector or a curator or a critic or an artist, they're all looking for slightly different things in a way, and that's always been the challenge with me, 'how do you do credible work? and make it accessible' - not dumb - and it's often about how you communicate things, quite sophisticated ideas in quite a simple way.

PON: One of the key differences between biennials and art fairs is that biennials talk, or the rhetoric around biennials is the idea of an evolutionary exhibition space, space that transforms and changes all the time in a way that is symbolically representative to developments within the world as well as the art world, and art fairs actually change everyday because the things are actually being sold, taken off the wall and being replaced by something else. But it seems to me that galleries, particularly the larger galleries, are now treating their allotted space within fairs as a potential curated space, in the same way as they curate their programme, and this emphasis on curation and programming seems to have been translated into the experiential space of the fair.

PS: I would agree. There has been an active desire from the fairs' organisers right from the start not to have an art fair which is full of booths with tiny paintings and prints on the wall, rather that the dealers are maybe showing one artist and doing a big project, or they're doing what you're saying, which is revolving - Tanya Bonakdar has always done this, she presents a programme which changes each day. And in fact, this is purely anecdotal, but it is also quite funny, this last year the art fair information booth, got a few questions, not many, but just a few, and they asked me about it, they said her booth is right near the information booth and she had a daily programme written on the wall which said 'Frieze Art Fair Programme', and listed the four artists, and they said what shall we do, because people think that that's the programme for the art fair.

PON: Two last short questions. One is about the relationship between

curatorial training programmes and curating. Specifically about the exhibition 'Fair', at the Royal College of Art, the MA curating show in 2001, which actually predates 'Frieze', and I wonder what you thought of it, particularly in relation to your own curatorial practice, and working within the context of an art fair.

PS: I did see that show, and it's one of the best shows that I've seen of that course. It's one of the shows that made a really ambitious proposal. I do have a relationship with that course, I teach sometimes on it, and I always think that their programme is quite a test of the zeitgeist. They're researching at a particular level and they want to do things which are in reaction to the show that went the year before and they want to be right on the interesting debates, and I think that year was really, really prescient. A little while after there was a show at the Royal Academy, which was quite weird, the show of commercial galleries but it wasn't an art fair. Those students were on to something. But, I also think it was really interesting as an exhibition. I mean, you go and they've made an exhibition and it's an art fair. There were a really interesting group of people involved in exhibiting in that show who were at a very particular point: kurimanzutto or the Modern Institute for example. And the students were really confident enough to go ahead with a show which was not going to look anywhere near like a regular show, in fact they had no idea what it was going to look like, and to take that risk was brave, and that's great, because they could have fallen flat on their faces. For a lot of people who expect a different kind of exhibition, it probably failed, but for people who are interested in these kind of ideas and thinking about exhibition making, it wasn't, it was great.

PON: And the last question is deliberately open ended, it's what is the future of curating?

PS: When I was talking earlier about that moment about two years ago when people were saying biennials are kind of boring, and then there was this shift and they became interesting again, and I think that's what the future is, and I think that's what is exciting at the moment, there has been a shift in expectation.

END OF TAPE

ROBERT STORR

New York, 30-03-05

PAUL O'NEILL: So how did you become a curator? You've often been called the accidental curator - I think Bruce Ferguson used the term 'the accidental curator'.

ROBERT STORR: I don't remember that, but he's right basically.

PON: And what's the first show that you curated?

RS: I'd basically curated two things before going to Modern. One was a show at a small arts school here called The Studio School, and for one year a friend and I became Directors by default, because the man who was a Director had a nervous breakdown, and in the context of that I did a small painting show of you know younger painters and that - well that was about 1986 or '87. And then I guess it was '89 I think - I can't remember exactly but it can be checked easily - '89 I was called in to curate a show of Susan Rothenberg in Malmo, which was basically the holdings of Frederick Roose, and I think they added a little bit and so, and then eventually Lars Nittve took over the space and we shared the credit on that, but I did most of the picking and the catalogue.

PON: Right. And what year was this? This was '86 as well?

RS: That's, I think that's more like '89 or '88 - I can't remember exactly, but you know I think that. And that was basically it. I mean I had, you know I'd been an art handler for a considerable time in the eighties, so I knew how to put shows together on that side, the technical side, which was actually far more important than going to a curatorial programme in many respects. But that's it.

PON: And your background is as an art historian? Or you studied art history?

RS: No I didn't actually, never studied art history. I was a, I'm a painter and I went to a regular sort of studio art college affair in Chicago, and a couple of other places before that, and I spent a lot of time in museums looking at what was there, got to the back rooms of a certain number of them just by persistence and interest and so on... But, and also as an art handler I got to the back rooms but no, no, I

have no formal art history training at all.

PON: And is the term 'curator' a term that you would have used at the time, in the mid-eighties, or would you have said that you organised art exhibitions?

RS: Well I mean the term was 'curator'. I think actually at the Modern, because of their editorial possibilities, they did not want to use 'curate' as a verb, they wanted to use 'curator' as a noun only and then they would say but…and organised exhibitions, and then… whereas Harald Szeemann would talk about 'exhibition maker' as an alternative to it, which I think is actually good. And I think there is some important distinction because curators are essentially responsible for collections, whereas making an exhibition may or may not draw on a collection but it isn't the same activity.

PON: And at the time would your ambition have been to work eventually within the institution as a curator?

RS: I had no ambition.

PON: No ambition, ok.

RS: I mean I'm a guy who has bumped into a number of interesting things to do, and done them, but I'm not a… I do not have a career plan.

PON: How would you see the role of the contemporary art curator as having developed from say '86, the mid-eighties, to now? Could you trace a kind of a history of that trajectory?

RS: Well I think the trajectory actually is, I mean the one that interests me, I'm sorry, is a longer one, and it's that you know if you look at teens, twenties, thirties, curators were very often gentlemen and occasionally gentlewomen aesthetes, and then some art historians, but the art historians tended to deal only with historical material. So the people who did things with roughly contemporary or contemporary art, modern art, were of this other nature. Now Barr as an art historian was the exception to this, and there were a certain

number of others of this type. But James and Phil Johnson, just to name people who were involved in the Museum of Modern Art, were of this other category, and alternatively they were people who came to museums in one capacity and trained through the ranks of museums, so that you arrived as a secretary or as a researcher or something without necessarily any special qualifications, and then got involved and learned and you know made a transition into a leading role. By the mid-sixties, in this country anyway, most of the curators in contemporary and modern art were art historians, and it was a very closed shop in that regard, or tended in that direction, and was very university-bound, and had a lot to do with reinforcing the so-called canon of modernism as theorised by Greenberg and consolidated by Bill Rubin and others. So that when I entered the scene, a few of us were now drifting in again from sort of the outer fields, and were allowed past the vetting process, which basically I have… You know I don't have the degrees, I didn't have the experience, you know, I was basically an art critic insofar as anybody knew me publicly at all. And so Richard Flood was the same, and so there were a few of us that sort of came in by those means, and we knew our way around the world but nobody knew that we did.

PON: And would you have been aware at the time, in the mid-eighties, would you have been aware of people like Alfred Barr and Philip Johnson, in terms of their exhibitionary display practice?

RS: Oh absolutely, I mean because part of my family was involved in modern art back to the twenties, and an aunt of mine was an exhibition organiser, patron type in Chicago - although I don't come from money. This is the other side of the family - but she made exhibitions at a place called The Arts Club in Chicago, and, you know, she worked with everybody - Mondrian and Picasso and she knew them and so on. And she brought art to Chicago, which at that time had almost no other comparable venues because the Institute was a conservative museum. And I met her in about 1967, and first of all I have a historical turn of mind, I read a lot, and secondly with her I went to exhibitions. So I met Sweeney and Bill and all these people at a very tender age, and knew about Barr and his history from a tender age, and knew the inside of the art world in that way too.

PON: Do you think that there have been dominant forms of curatorial path that have developed in the last say fifteen to twenty years? I mean one dominant form would perhaps be the group exhibition, and it's often argued that the group exhibition is the serious work of the curator. And I know that within your biography of exhibitions there's been kind of an equal focus on both group and monographic exhibitions.

RS: I would have done more group exhibitions had I been able to. There was an enormous exhibition that Debbie Wei, who is the Chief Curator of Prints and Illustrated Books. Mike Dindabrosky was, is no longer there but was in drawing, and I had planned for years, which was to be a big show of European art from basically 1948 through Turner, Fontana from Argentina, to '68, and to sort of track the ways in which painting became new forms of installation, performance, conceptually-oriented forms. And then at the '68 to '72 margin, where people who had either been painters but had stopped, or who had never been painters really and started in these alternative mediums, began to drift back into painting. Some of them, you know, like Clemente to Boetti for example or of Kiefer to Beuys and so on. So all I would say is that I would have gladly done more bigger themed shows if the Modern's capacities had been greater.

PON: I mean do you think that the group exhibition is ultimately the serious work of the curator?

RS: No, no, I think that's…, I think good monographic exhibitions or two or three person exhibitions are equally important, and offer, as a curator, forms to work with that are different from the group show. So I wouldn't… I think museums first of all should have mixed programming of that kind. I think secondly the chance to work deeply with somebody is different than the chance to make interesting combinations across a wide playing field. If the artist is alive it's a very different dynamic, the writing possibilities are different, and the audience's capacity to sort of go under the skin of style or idea or ism or whatever it is, is afforded by the monographic show, which you can't do with the other. On the other hand you can get stuck in a kind of biographical or historical narrative mode if you do only the other kind. That's to be avoided as well.

PON: And what past curatorial models, paradigms, exhibitions, historical precedents or precursors would you say have been quite influential in terms of your own practice?

RS: I hope this doesn't sound disingenuous or vain but there aren't any that I sort of hold up, because again I wandered into this. I think what I've used is more in the nature of visual images, which I know belong to certain shows but I can't claim to have made a study of those shows or the practice around them. So that you know the Lissitzky room, or you know Barr shows or whatever, I know, I have a mind's eye picture of what they look like, and I've learned a lot by just letting that sort of be there in my head. I've been to exhibitions a lot, and I saw for example the big Paris-New York-Moscow exhibitions, curated by Pontus Hulten. I saw crucial exhibitions in the seventies and sixties here, in New York, but there are relatively few of them that I could call models, they're sort of like memory traces of how spaces work or how much or how little information is appropriate for certain kinds of work, of disasters. I mean I have a lot of negative models, you know, of shows that are over designed or over labelled or what have you, and so it's stuff like that.

PON: Are there any specific exhibitions, negative exhibitions or negative models that come to mind?

RS: Well, I'll give you a positive model of something which is usually a negative one, put it this way, that the Paris-Moscow exhibition which is the one of that group that I remember the most vividly.

PON: It's the Pontus Hulten show?

RS: Yes. That show was at the limit of how much stuff you could cram in a room and how many corners you could turn and how much text you could have, and so on. And, given the nature of the art partly, which was very text heavy and which was very dynamic, it worked marvellously well. You know it was one of the first places where I saw Tatlin's Tower in reduced marquette, which is a thing I would normally have been not inclined to do, but he showed well how under certain circumstances it made good sense and so on. So I learned a lot from

those exhibitions.

PON: In the *Power of Display, History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls a certain art historical 'amnesia' towards exhibitionary, or innovative exhibitionary display factors of the past. Do you think that this amnesia has either advertently or inadvertently obviously affected the way in which we perceive contemporary art curating?

RS: Well I'm not sure that amnesia is the right term. I take her point, I mean she's right that people have fallen into the trap of making a certain kind of rather neutral display mode, but I think it's really unfair to the better curators to say that they don't know this and that they don't use it. And I must say, I mean since we raised this earlier in our pre-conversation, she's not as attentive as she claims to be. For example the show that I did, 'Dislocations', at the Modern, which she is quite critical of, she completely neglected to mention one of the key works in the show, which was Sophie Calle's intervention into the heart of the collection. So she writes a description that suggests that this is just a series of boxes that are controlled entirely by the artist's sensibility, and that the curator is neutral. Well first of all there was one exhibition which was in the core of the collection, which was my decision, it was Sophie's decision, and so on. Two, she neglected to discuss the fact that in the entrance to the downstairs part I didn't paint the sheet rocking. And the point was to show the tape job, and the rock, and to make it very apparent that this was cartilage built in that space, so that you'd be aware of the entire package of the gallery, and therefore not treat the things you walk into as natural. And there were numerous other aspects of that show that she didn't notice. So first of all in my own terms I think her criticism is based on a kind of generalisation which she pursues without the necessary attention to subtler ways of doing what she's talking about, and number two I think the Szeemann's and others in the world are not unmindful of these precedents, and I think that may be a little bit of a historical arrogance, and a library-bound sensibility.

PON: Would you like to expand upon your certain kind of criticism of that publication?

RS: I think she found a very good topic and I think she deserves credit for having gone after it, and it had not been done so I won't take that away from her. But I think that the institutional critiques that have been done specifically at the Modern tend to homogenise the history of the Modern, and tend to ascribe general attitudes to what is in fact a diverse staff. And within that staff interesting things have been done, but people keep harping on the sort of the major chords. The major chords were sounded by Bill Rubin, who was an unadventurous character in every possible way. Although I'm not a great fan of him personally, Kynaston McShine did some quite remarkable things. And other people have as well. Jenny Licht did it, and others, you know in the projects programmes, and so on and so forth. So in speaking of the Modern as if it was a monolithic institution with one presiding way of going about things, she simply didn't. She in a sense used an early innovative phase, which was Barr and others, as a weapon against the later phases, but she simply missed the examples in the later phases that actually are much more attached to the early ones and which curators at the Modern were actively trying to resist the temptation towards homogenisation, which bureaucratically and politically as well as in practice was hard work and for which they should have gotten some credit.

PON: Do you think that someone like Kynaston McShine is kind of an underrated or perhaps an under-represented curator? I mean I'm thinking particularly of the 'Information', exhibition etc.

RS: You know Kynaston basically quit as an innovative curator very early. He had one last good idea, which I frankly think was not well executed, which was 'The Museum as Muse'. It was a badly done show on a good theme. But between that and his early work are essentially large monographic shows done in a rather conventional manner, often with ideas from other people or with the collaboration of other people. 'Information' is really an extraordinary show. 'Primary Structures', which was in many ways a grab bag show, has the real historical importance nonetheless, not only because it brought certain minimalists to the fore but because it was an expression of a taste change and he was on time for it, you know. If you look back at it, I think James Meyers' book is very good about this you know. If you

look back at it, actually it's got Philip King in it and it's got everybody under the sun, so the amount of discrimination involved, either categorically or in terms of quality, is not all that it might have been at the time, but it was very early on and he deserves some credit for having seized it. His show of Yves Klein at the Jewish Museum also was an important exhibition. Klein came here, Castelli Sonnabend actually showed him, but he got nowhere fast, and Kynaston you know did in fact honour him, and he's done many things like that, to his credit.

PON: Do you think that it is the responsibility of curators to address what Mary Anne Stansiszewski calls a certain amnesia towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past, or a kind of a repressed history?

RS: Well again, I'm afraid that rings conspiratorial to me. Repressed by whom? Amnesia maybe, that's better because it doesn't suggest an act of will on somebody's part. I think what we're really talking about though is the good side and the bad side of the idea of the neutral space - Brian O' Doherty's 'white cube' - and the good side is that for certain kinds of art it's essential and for certain kinds of art and even for some kinds of art that are not, if you will, ready made for it but can be, well, not displayed but shown - that's better - in it, it's an amazingly rich possibility. If it simply becomes the box by default, you know the unit by default, and if otherwise the installations are pedestrian intellectually and visually, then she's right that it's the path of least resistance and it effectively, it becomes the habit that makes you forget that there are any other choices. But I think it's an exaggeration to say that that is so pervasive. I also think that the other side of the coin is something to be worried about as well, because we have seen in many exhibitions where exhibitions are either handed over to exhibition designers, professionals, who are essentially graphic designers and who create monstrosities like the current Brooklyn Museum installation, or they're handed over to people who are architects but not necessarily very good with certain kinds of visual art - painting, sculpture or what have you, and respond unfortunately to pressures from museums to create user-friendly environments, and so they apply their skills to jazzing things up. And they can be very well made

versions of those things but they may also be essentially marketing, you know. So really good innovative exhibition design is predicated on the natures of the specific work involved, the house that you're working in, you know if it's a heavy character already, you can work with it or against it but you have to think about how you do that in detail, not every space affords every option, your audience, and so on. And just making exhibitions that are historically important in exhibition history but that do violence to the art in question is not such a great idea, and there are a lot of people out there trying it.

PON: Are there certain current exhibitions or recent exhibitions that you've seen that you would have a positive opinion of in terms of the relationship between exhibition design and curatorial practice?

RS: I saw 'Cities on The Move', for example at the Hayward and I have worked at the Hayward as well, and it's a tough space, and I quite liked it. I mean I think actually the exhibition was thin as an exhibition but I think the exhibition conception and execution was really quite good. I think by and large Okwui's 'Documenta XI' was good, but it wasn't particularly innovative but it was well considered for these enormous shows, which are so hard to do. I always blank when I am sort of asked what's your favourite show etc.

PON: Well it's not quite that question but…

RS: But you see… Yeah I know but, I mean it's like I, you know this is a name and psychology for it like you know the categorical something or other. I see a lot of shows that I have interest in, and I learn from shows and I watch what people do. I have my own general tendencies, which are to create spaces where the work has the greatest amount of breathing space, where the viewer is given ways to move but not dictated how they should actually do it finally, and so on. So I tend to like open shows that are well calibrated in terms of the work and the spaces and so on. But I've seen other things that are really sort of you know carnivalesque or whatever that are not bad.

PON: And I recently interviewed Okwui Enwezor and one of the questions I asked him was how would he define his curatorial practice? I think he said ultimately as an intellectual pursuit.

Would you see curating, your own kind of involvement in curating, as being an intellectual pursuit, or is there other terminology that you would use to describe or prioritise your own practice?

RS: My sort of catchphrase is from American, you know, grammar school, which is show and tell. You know, I think exhibition making is essentially a combination of the two. Now if you have nothing to tell, in other words if you have no ideas, if there's no intellectual not only information but if there's no intellectual structure for it, then the telling is the most boring kind of art education, blah blah blah blah blah. But I would prefer generally speaking to show before telling. I think that what the curator or exhibition organiser does is to pick a body of work - multiple makers or a single maker - and try and think about how best to think about it at that particular historical moment, which is not necessarily another one, right. And then within the realms of possibilities, which is the other side of this - many people when they review shows or talk about exhibitions speak as if all things were always available at your beck and call, and exhibition makers are politicians of sort of poverty. You know they beg for things and then they do their best not to sell their souls in order to get them, and begging doesn't work! So I mean what would make the ideal exhibition of a given theme or a given artist is never what you're dealing with. And so the craft of it, and I think it is a craft, is applied to primary work, which is definitely intellectual, but that the craft of it in my view should lean heavily on the side of letting people discover works in some kind of coherent fashion before they are told very much about them, that they can first of all have what I think is essential always to art and to all exhibitions, is a sense of not knowing what they're about, and estrangement, and that they should be made to feel not comfortable with that because the whole purpose is not necessarily to make them comfortable, but to make them accept that as a condition of something that they will then really benefit from. And that exhibitions, which over prepare the viewer, which explain before you encounter the first shock, which in any other way sort of just you know gets people comfy in their mental sofas, is not good. That furthermore if you're going to be against the meta-narratives, the grand narratives, and all this kind of stuff, don't go out and start making your own. And what we've seen a lot of in recent years are people with a post-modern education

suspicious of meta-narratives, who immediately, when given the opportunity, start telling people that this is the truth and this is how you should read it, and there's one interpretive point of view and that we believe in principle in the power of the reader but we don't believe in the power of the seer, or the viewer, and it goes, and all the contradictions recreate themselves. So my view is that you… you study, you think, you develop at least five or six ways of doing the same show in your own mind and in your own estimation, and then you fashion something out of that with the intention of allowing the viewer to have something of the same kind of process in their discovery of it, you know that they could turn left, they could turn right, that they're not immediately drawn to the didactics but that they're left to use their own capacities to puzzle out what they see, that they're not expected to like what they see, it's not about art loving, you know it's about looking and thinking, and that they're given the time to be perplexed, a bit hostile maybe in some cases, and then given a helping hand once they've gotten to the point where that information is part of the construction of a useful thing that is theirs, rather than the imparting of something which is yours as a curator.

PON: I'm interested in your choice of the term 'craft' in order to define curating. Would you like to expand upon that a little bit?

RS: No in a literal sense it is. I mean knowing how to light a show, place pictures, design spaces. At the Modern we were allowed essentially to re-design the architecture within the outer frame to our taste or needs. A lot of these things are, they're material things you make, you know. It's not an art form, and I'm quite opposed to the notion that the curator is an artist. I have been an artist for a long time, I'm not a particularly well known one, but I was a real one, am a real one, and I, you know I know that when you get into trouble with your art and then get out of it, it's an entirely different experience than what you're doing with an exhibition. We're editors, we're presenters, we're many things, but we're not artists, and the minute we think that we're artists we tend to get competitive with the artists and that fucks things up for good. So that aside, it is a craft and people have different strengths and

weaknesses. There are some all round craftsmen in this department. Many people have only one or two of the desired or necessary things, and they are wise for example to go out and get craftsmen to work with them, so people who are not good at designing spaces, you know, should talk to an architect. But they should be the client and they should not let their architect run away with the show. Ditto for lighting, ditto for all kinds of things. But all of these crafts are subordinated to the thing that you wish to create on behalf of the artist or artists and then on behalf of the viewer. You are convening an encounter basically between people you don't know and something that you do know, and you have to assume that the people you don't know are diverse and various and that you need to find levels of entry for just about anyone. So you don't talk down, you don't talk up, but you talk at multiple levels in a manner, which is, I won't say inviting exactly but that says you have every reason to be here, you have even more reason to stay.

PON: Would you say that your background as an artist ultimately has impacted upon your relationship with the work that you incorporate into your exhibitions?

RS: I have to in some ways. I generally speaking did not do shows about my taste for example. I mean I did shows about artists that interested me and very often they interested me because at some point they had been a problem for me, and then in working out my relationship to them I discovered something about them and something that I think would be you know of interest to somebody else. I think the way in which my being an artist probably has the greatest impact is that I am, you know, omnivorously, promiscuously and unashamedly scopophilic, I look at everything. And when I look I have no taste. I have taste you know in what I show, maybe, but I don't rate taste very high among the virtues anyway. But I mean I can be fascinated by just about anything, and also having been an artist - and this is a phase you go through - you don't know who you are as an artist so you look around you and you just like absorb stuff because you think well maybe that's it, you know maybe if I could just be him or her then I would know who I was, which is folly. But, you know, the point is that you spend a lot of time looking at incredibly disparate stuff. And I also have a good visual memory, so when I'm curating

exhibitions, a little bit like I was talking about, remembering layouts of shows, you know when I think about something, in the back of my mind already is something I've seen some other place, you know says me too. You know, or cross reference, or have you thought about? And that's the way the process gets richer, so you're not sort of like force-marched by an idea past all but the obvious contenders. You're constantly looking over your shoulder into the sides and thinking well jeez what did I forget or actually I think this idea really sucks but the thing I started with is valid, so there's this other thing it reminds me of is also interesting, and the sparks that they create is maybe the real idea.

PON: Curators are often now seen as kind of being the creative component within the production and mediation of artwork's true exhibition-making. How do you see your role as a curator, and at what point or what level of the artistic production do you see in fact being involved within the process of art making?

RS: Well I think it is, I think it is a creative element in this work, that if you take the model of a good editor, a passive editor simply you know lets things be published or does the most rudimentary you know cutting and pasting. A more dynamic and a more useful editor will attempt to grasp the intention of the writer, and in dialogue with the writer say I don't think this works and I'm not sure what the answer is and I'm certainly not going to tell you what it is but I could think of the following options - which requires that you sort of get inside the thing itself and that you have a synthetic, not just a reactive mind. There is the psychological issue of when you say that. In some cases you probably should never say it - it throws people off too much to be worth what you might get back for it. In other cases you have artists who are used to it or so confident in themselves that they're not going to be, you know, too distracted. But there have been numbers of situations where I've waited until clearly a problem was at a stalemate, and then said well what about this. Or sometimes just talk it back to a person, I say well this is what I see, and I talk it back in such a way that there are built into my description some variants. And then I hand it back. But I, again I think it's really a bad idea to push that too far, partly because you also have artists who are weak, you know, who have strengths but are

weaker psychologically and then they begin not really understanding what you're saying but to try to respond to it directly, and then it throws them neither into your interpretation but does it throw them, it throws them off their own base and it doesn't get them to yours. And then you've got an artist who gets paralysed because they don't know what they're doing anymore.

PON: Would you say that you've worked predominantly with artists or with artworks?

RS: I've done both. I mean I've done both historical and contemporary shows where they've had very little contact if any with the artist, but I've done many kinds of project-based shows where I worked with the artist. And the other thing you know, having been an artist and having been a critic for a long time, I know a hell of a lot of people. So, you know, my relation to them is often with people I've had a long sort of acquaintance with, and sometimes real friendships. The other thing is that, I mean I think in certain ways people describe me as an artist to humour me because that's how I describe myself, and you know it's all very well and good, that's fine, it eases social things, but the truth of the matter is I think about the world that way, whatever that way might be, and it's certainly not the way art historians think about it, and many theoretical critics. And I think artists pick up on that, and it's possible to have a different quality of discussion, and even if they're in the back of their mind thinking well actually this guy's a failed painter but what the hell, I'll be nice to him, they're getting a different kind of conversation than they would have gotten from somebody else.

PON: There seems to be a very close relationship between writing or art criticism and your curatorial practice. Would you see them as being completely intertwined or interdependent?

RS: Yeah. I mean the writing is very often sort of the scout for the exhibitions. As with exhibitions the writing is often a way of resolving my relationship to something that is complicated that I have not yet resolved. I make it a point not to make exhibitions based on what I've previously written. If I start with an artist on whom I've

said something I start clean, I try not to re-write the essay, I try not to make a show that is essentially the pictorial demonstration of an object demonstration of what I've said and so on. But it's, as I say it's a scout, it went out there, it had a look around and came back and said yeah that's worth the effort.

PON: How was it in terms of your perception of your own behaviour as a curator? How was it moving from being kind of somewhat independent, to then working within a very large institution and then becoming somewhat independent again more recently?

RS: The transition in was not difficult. The transition out has been more difficult than I would have imagined, partly because people don't see me. I mean you didn't know I didn't work there anymore, so a lot of people see me still as being institutional. A lot of people also now see me as being a kind of lame duck, or somebody who should be institutional but isn't, and that becomes problematic, so why am I freelance and how serious is this, and again then you just blow and it you know… So there's all that kind of art world, you know, assumption of motives and consequences which is irritating, and that's hard. Personally I also loved working in the museum because one did have a collection, and I like working with collections. And I like building. Two, I'm a kind of a… I'm an old sixty-eighter who's become a twenty-first century reformer. I mean I'm not making revolutions anymore but I want to see the world change. And MOMA gave you big levers to change ideas about certain things. And one can exaggerate but they're real levers and people do respond, and some things, some of the consequences were what I wanted you know. And freelance exhibition making generally doesn't give you that. Plus it's a game you know. Big institutions want to stay put. Being the artful dodger within the big institution is fun, it's good for them, it's good for you, but it's also chess, and all the games of chance and information are fun.

PON: A key word that Seth Siegelaub used in the late sixties in order to clarify the changing role of the curator during that period, was 'demystification'. How relevant do you think this term is in terms of the evaluation of contemporary curatorial practice?

RS: Essential. I think the demystification is a crucial part. Now

there are different ways of doing it, and there are different opportunities or moments for it. But you know working against expectation, doing institutional critique from inside institutions, doing guerilla actions from outside institutions that have institutions in their cross hairs, and all kinds of ways in which one might think of this. If you work in institutions, you're in a somewhat different situation inasmuch as your best bet, basically, is to create the maximum transparency, and then be as candid as possible about the places where opacity is necessary. You know, really say I can't tell you that but I will acknowledge that there is something to be said, rather than say oh no that's…. But I mean basically is to treat the institution as a tool rather than as a thing to be honoured, protected, whatever it is for its own right. Institutions are tools. And if you say that that's the case and if you can make a persuasive argument that the tool is basically doing its job, and that the job is basically a job that needs to be done, then you're on pretty good ground. If the institution is misbehaving, then what you have to do is create examples of how the same mechanism could produce a better result by a cleaner process.

PON: As someone who's been curating for twenty years, how would you have seen the developments of the role of the curator, both independently or within institutions during that period?

RS: I think the institution curators, having had some good moments in the eighties and nineties, are now being driven into corners. Curators are being treated as they're being glorified in public and treated as hired hands by a managerial class. So the managerial class is jealous of their publicity, but also knows that they have less power than ever before and ruthlessly exploit that fact. I think that the independent curators have relative freedom in regard to this, but on the other hand their problem is that they are working in a super-heated environment where increasingly they have to do kinds of work they don't really want to do just to keep the machinery rolling. They have to do more jobs, they have to make them flashier, they are competing with their peers so that just staying on base you know means the big gesture, not the well made small gesture. I've enormous respect for Suzanne Ghez for example, and for numbers of other people who work in small to mid-sized institutions and just keep making good

exhibitions. She's a kind of freelance institution, if you will, rather than a freelance curator. I mean she's got a shop tailored to herself, and she gets to do what she wants you know. And I think the luckiest curators now generally are in that kind of situation. I'm worried for some of my colleagues who shall remain nameless, whose talents are real, whose energy is enormous, whose you know their fresh minds are great, but they are being turned into, you know, expendable directors for kind of genre exhibitions.

PON: Of your own exhibitions, which would you pinpoint as being most expanding of the role of the curator and the notion of what the curator does?

RS: I don't know what to say. I would treat them as an aggregate. Again I'm not… I don't see myself as a crusader, innovator, where I had sort of this was the quintessential version of what I want. I was learning on the job, I was moving through historical time where the tendency is to an increasingly managed art situation were increasing, and I did the best I could under the circumstances.

PON: I mean one of the key changes, or developments, particularly since the late eighties, is the continued expansion of biennials international, or biennials, of which I know you're curating the next 'Venice Biennale'. Do you think that ultimately biennials are a good thing, or do you think we need any more?

RS: Well we're going to do a conference in Venice this December to address that question. Now I don't want to sort of put all my cards on the table right this minute because, one I'm not really sure of all these issues, and two, you know that pre-judges what will happen, and that's not really a good idea. I'll say this though. I think biennials are misused in many cases, and I think the sheer number of them is having an effect on the quality of curatorial work and the quality of the art shown in them. On the other hand I for example, as a hugely enthusiastic supporter of Paolo Herkenoff. And I did a small part of his Biennial in San Paolo, and I did a small Bruce Nauman show. But Paolo, you know, did with that show what those shows were meant to do for the public, which is to create a venue where art worlds came together, where real ideas but not determining doctrines

or theories or big hooks and catchphrases, but you know real ideas, came in contact with, or were brought into contact with people by works of art. And you know Latin America is a vast continent, which had relatively little communication among its own nations. The trajectories were from X to New York, or from X to Paris, but from Caracas to San Paolo or from you know Santiago to Buenos Aires was until recently less common. And the Biennial when it was founded was the sort of the site where that could finally occur on the continent, and I think it was enormously important and gives that Biennial a special character. Paolo's intention, and I think to a good degree the result, was to expand the educational programmes, so that it wasn't just an art world public that was viewed as important but rather the larger hinterland of the city itself and of the country. And I think that's also very important, and I think so much of what is said about biennials now only considers the art public, the migratory public, or the immediately focused, dedicated audience in that place, and doesn't consider these things as temporary museums in often under developed institutional centres for art. Not under developed in the sense of primitive but just that there are not enough institutions, they're not strong enough, people don't get to see enough, so that they could be culturally very sophisticated countries but in the visual arts there's comparatively less activity than in film and literature for example. So I think that the positive side of biennials is that they should be dealt with much more in terms of where they are, who they serve in the immediate surround, how to develop them as outreach institutions of all kinds culturally, socially, politically, all kinds, and that that's a gradual process. What militates against it now is the sheerly tourist and commercial orientation of many of them, and the showcase, the national showcase part of it. And they're not absolutely incompatible, but if any of that side has the upper hand the other side will suffer, and has suffered already. And you can't have as many as we have. You know there ought to be sort of region by region, one very strong one and maybe fewer smaller ones you know so, you know, maybe two in Australia but not five, you know a couple in China but not a dozen. You know a couple in maybe Korea but maybe one, you know maybe one in Japan, and like that, and not because I have anything against the cities that would lose out but I just don't think the system can sustain it. The artists can't produce work of a quality that would really merit doing

it and so on. So I would say a measured contraction.

PON: And I suppose the other point is also that it is often a very small band of curators who are given the responsibility to curate a number of biennials.

RS: And I think that's a huge problem, and I don't, I have respect for most - not all, but most of the people who have been on that circuit. But they tend to do the same kind of shows over and over again. There is a kind of - what's the right word? - carpet-bagging in the worst case, and the best case impresario circus comes to town aspect to it which is not so great. They tend not to stay in these places very long, and I think it's really important as I said to build links between the exhibition as an institution and the community at large, and you can't always count on the patron network and the resident bureaucracy to do that - in fact in some cases it's not in their interest to do that. So that taking that role is something that somebody else needs to do.

PON: I mean something that I've kind of identified recently is a kind of a tension, in particular with international biennials, between the potentiality for them being a collective practice - I'm talking about like 'Johannesburg Biennial', 'Documenta XI' or Bonami's Venice 2003 - there are a lot of them that have focused on collaboration between curators and what's interesting more recently is, well I suppose your appointment as next Venice Director, and also Roger Buergel's appointment as Director of the next 'Documenta', so it's almost there seems to be this tension between the idea of sharing it as a curatorial activity, and the kind of, I suppose what I would call the post-Szeemannian notion of the exhibition curator as author.

RS: Okay your models were collective versus impresario auteur. Okay. Well first of all I don't think the fact that a single person does a show means that that single person is an auteur, and I think that's really, you know… Barr was not an auteur, he did a lot of individual shows, he had a way of working that's interesting to examine and had some consistencies and so on, but the idea that the artist, that

curator as auteur is another version of the idea that the curator is an artist, and that what we're more interested in is the thought of the curator in relation to something more than we're interested in the works and their relation to each other, and I'm pretty much trying to avoid this idea as much as I can. I just don't think that's the way to go. And if you look at his practice, 'When Attitudes Become Form', is an extraordinary exhibition and his show 'Gesamkunstwerk', which I didn't see, but I know by catalogue, is a very interesting exhibition, but I'm not inclined at the end of the day to worry about how Harry got from one to the other, you know. And that's an auteur, right. I'm more interested in the fact that a man had a large mind and could grapple with a variety of interesting topics. And I give him lots of credit, but I'm much more interested in what was in those shows than I am interested in him.

PON: I mean if you were to look at all the exhibitions that you've curated would you say that there is, as a body of work - which it is work, I mean it's a kind of production, it's a giving to the world - would you say that there is a lineage or would you say just an inter-connectivity between certain kind of themes, ideas, running through them?

RS: There are.

PON: Strands, yeah?

RS: Yeah. But before we get to whatever I've done, I mean the other side of it is I think… I've worked on a couple of collective shows and I've been, you know I've worked on a couple of collective shows where I was the, you know, one of the principals, and I've worked in shows where I was brought in to do a particular thing. I mean I was on the 'Sydney Biennial' team for example once. And they can work, and they can be interesting, and you can learn a lot from each other and they can enrich the possibilities because you just have more minds working. They also, like any committee work, can devolve into something that is the average of the tastes of the people involved, that is log rolling professionally so that you give somebody a job and they give you a job and, and around and round and round it goes, so there's some downsides to it too. And I think there's a lot of both

going around right this minute. And I think the other side of it is that whereas you don't want to present exhibitions with a single point of view that the audience is supposed to interpret as the gospel on this or that, shows with no point of view is not a good idea either. And I think that's what we're getting some of as well. Particularly shows with no point of view and big headlines. Something that declares that this will rock their world, and then when you get in there it's like, it's like spaghetti.

PON: And I guess that this is a question that is maybe too soon to ask, but it's probably the first time I've interviewed someone who is planning a biennial with a lot of time in hand, whereas I have interviewed a lot of people who've curated biennials or I've interviewed a lot of people who've been involved in that circuit. But it is the first time I have interviewed someone who is in the process of developing ideas for a biennial. At what stage would you say that you're at now, two years, two and a half years away from now?

RS: I mean one thing is that, you know, nobody in recent memory has had the proper amount of time to do one of these things in Venice, and I insisted that I had more time than, you know, was originally on offer, and anyway I had a show at the Modern this fall, which is my last show there, so I couldn't do it on the short hop they wanted. So I'm going to use that time, and the best use of that time is not to lock in early. So I'm going to do a lot of travel, and since, as I say, I've been in transition I may say in Hollywood, in turn around, you know I've not been as attentive to like breaking news this couple of years as I would have otherwise been. And so I want to go back out there and find out stuff that's, you know, current that I haven't seen, and catch up some stuff that I know is out there but haven't seen. And in any case just let my mind sort of settle on. I have a title in my head basically, it's just a phrase, and I have a good sense of where I want it to land, the tenor of it if you will. I also want to do, and before this was announced with Rosa Martinez and Maria de Corral are doing, which is to rein it in terms of the number of people. But I want to spend a lot of time just doing what I described before, which is to not you know follow da da da da da in the logic, but sort of take a couple of steps and then look back into the sideways and see if there's something that is better than the next

thing in the trajectory that I'd already embarked on, and just do that for a full year so that by the end of the year whatever I have will be better for being less determined by intention.

PON: But at the moment you're trying not to fix things ultimately?

RB: No. I've spoken to one artist, who I want to work with because they are the sort of tuning fork for this exhibition. And I have another artist who's in the same category who I have not spoken to yet but I will probably. But that's it. And given the kind of work that they do, it's variety, there are lots of you know adjacent spaces. I think these exhibitions should be made for the viewer. I think if they are an ordeal to see, and if there is more information than any reasonable person can assimilate in the time that people spend on these things and so on, you don't do the artist a service, you don't do the public a service. Again you read post-modernism, and people say isn't it terrible that the author dictates to the reader and then they, given the chance to dictate, do so. And the same thing holds true for spectacle, you read endless amounts of stuff about the society of spectacle, and then what do people go off and do, they make a spectacle. You know and they may have a wonderful sort of intellectual conceit about how they really can critique a spectacle, but honestly, you know, a circus is a circus, and you know I don't want to make a circus.

PON: When you use the term 'viewer', is there a particular viewer that you have in mind? I mean because obviously most people that visit biennials are actually from outside of them. And one of the things I've always been surprised about is in, you know, visiting the 'Venice Biennale', is the inability to locate Venetians who actually go to the Biennale, because somehow it's kind of impeding upon their kind of daily livelihood.

RS: Well I mean, again this is said with all modesty, because I don't know the situation on that, but I have three students who are working with me on the show, two of whom are Italian - or Italian-speaking I should say, and have lived there, one of them is actually from Rhodesia, the other one is Italian, but they're totally bilingual, they've lived and worked there, and the other one has seen a lot of

Biennales. And I've said to them I want to deal with this issue, so one of the things we've done is to research how the school system works in that region, and at different levels, whether our history is taught, if there is a common curriculum or is there not, what's the relation between the Venice part of this equation and the Mestre part of it? Who would we talk to? Who would be art historians within the local university system who might be available also? Is there any way to connect the university system and its variation and analysis to public schooling, etc., etc., etc. So what I want to do basically is to know enough about it so that then, as an organiser, I can convene a conversation and say look folks I'm not a missionary, I'm not going to tell you how to run your lives, I don't know. But it seems to me if there's any way to activate these systems in relation to one another, I will put part of my efforts behind then making that link to the institutional biennale for which I am responsible in this case.

PON: That's interesting. One of the questions that slipped through the net there, was that I asked you about the kind of common strands within your kind of exhibitions.

RS: Yeah there are. Well I mean again it's hard to sort of hold all those in mind. I will tell you what is on my mind if you want to say that. I was, you know I grew up in Chicago, I lived in France, I worked in Mexico and I've been to a lot of places. I arrived in New York in 1980 basically, and I was in and out of New York from 1967, but I did not grow up at the centre of the American art world at the time that it thought it was the centre of the universe. I grew up in places, which always were looking at that centre and surprised by how sure it was that it was that, and irritated by it, and fascinated by it, and all the things that go with it. And also I was quite convinced that there was really interesting art that either was made in New York but was not treated in the proper manner, or that was not made in New York at all, or that the best way to look at some of the so-called mainstream art was not with the eye to that designation but with an oblique and sort of dissenting eye, for the art but not for the critical streamlining of the art. So I have… much of my thinking has been about how to write about art differently, and how to show art differently, not just counter-punching, not just being the predictable antagonist to that notion, but how to really break the notion up and

reintegrate the pieces with other pieces that were never a part. So that if I make a show of a Robert Ryman or a Tony Smith, it's mindful of the fact that both of them were New York artists, both of them worked in an idiom, an abstract idiom that was congruent with mainstream art. But you know Bob didn't get the attention that Frank Stella did. He wasn't recognised in general in the American audience the way a lot of other artists were. He was much more appreciated in Europe than he was in this country. Tony Smith is an interesting sculptor precisely because he does so many things with the same variables that are opposite from what minimalism is about. He's a gestural sculptor, he's an anthropomorphic sculptor, he is many things. And that if you begin to build out from such examples - I wrote about Eva Hesse in the same interest, and I'm curious now that Eva Hesse is being sort of homogenised into the mainstream. I mean it's not that she doesn't belong or deserve the prominence but that one shouldn't now treat somebody who was outside of it as if they're a perfect fit for it after all, you know. And particularly now if the mainstream is re-jiggered with the whole art of adaptations that become predictive. We always knew that. Of course that's the way it would turn out, everybody… You know if you look at Rosalind Krauss's book for example, you know Eva Hesse gets I think a line, maybe two - two sentences - and I think one illustration, right? Now *October* magazine has suddenly discovered the glory of Eva Hesse and has published an independent volume on her greatness, is to remedy their previous oversight, not to validate their method. And I think a lot of what we're seeing now in revisionism is not a genuine rethinking of the structures, it's a game of patch and fill to maintain the authority of a dogma, but allow for examples that previously escaped precisely because the dogma excluded them.

So for example, that's one type. Two, to take people who are much further out of it than that, you know, and to look at, at the black sheep of the modernist family basically. And the show that I did, 'Modern Art Despite Modernism', was about that. I mean much of the work in that exhibition does not please me, and some of it I actually actively think is specious and should not, but it is a part of the history of art, it's a part of the history of that institution, and that if you make an exhibition as that series was, about how a museum viewed modern art, and if you realise that they have dozens and hundreds of examples of neo-romantic art and of realism and things

like that, and if you've heard a thousand times the complaint that the Modern has again this very rigid narrow idea and you know that you know buried in the closets are all the counter-examples, and if you know that Barr had as much of a weakness for Behrmann as he had for you know understanding of Picasso, then it's great to get that stuff out, it makes an art world that is much more textured, it makes the weaknesses of certain great people a more interesting integrated part of their strengths and so on.

PON: I mean you seem to be suggesting that one of the problems with a revisionist attitude towards the mistakes of our relationship or the academic or the historicisation of the past, is the kind of homogenisation of the language or discourse around those events.

RS: Absolutely, and the teleological notion that we really were on a trajectory that some people knew and that the best artists made manifest. I mean it's simply rubbish. And I think one can make judgements accordingly, I think one can make judgements of historical worthiness, around worthiness, but the art world is plural always. It is not that we're just going through a pluralist phase, it has been, modernism has been plural from the get-go. Anti-modernism is an integral part of modernism, in some artists it appears in like Picabia and Picasso and numbers of others. It appears almost on an alternate day basis. So to deal with the master narratives or the revised master counter-narratives as if they were the truth of the phenomenon, which again since I'm image and object oriented, I'm a promiscuous looker, start with what people did and then figure out how to think about that. Don't start with an idea of what should have happened and then you know apportion your attention to things according to whether it fits that scenario. And that's what we've essentially had. So Greenberg and all allied and derivative kinds of formalism and post-modernist criticism are the problem. And I make exhibitions and write in order to point out that they are the problem, that the problem that they are consists of a false view of history so if you are, as I was and am still, a man of the left in many ways, the failures of the left have a lot to do with the failures of this view, you know of a very neat, tight connection between progressive art and progressive ideas. And also that people do the wrong thing, and they have wonderful effects. You know Pollock - and this is, I wrote this essay on

Pollock for Kirk's Pollock show, and George McField, who's a New York school painter, said you know we were all in this Hans Hoffmann class and we were learning about push-pull and we were learning about good modern art, and Matisse and Picasso - how is it that a guy who had all the wrong examples, by which he meant Cicados and Thomas Hart Benton, he was making entirely painting, paintings - how is it that he was the one who made the great breakthrough? And that's exactly the right question and is half of the answer.

PON: I mean it's kind of quite fashionable now to have this idea that you know modernism didn't have a beginning, middle or end, that there are you know multiple modernisms.

RS: Absolutely.

PON: You know to continue a narrative, and it's something that you've kind of reiterated quite early on in the nineties and before that.

RS: And I also said it before on numerous occasions.

PON: I mean I know people like Hou Hanru or Okwui Enwezor as well, or two people who've been kind of advocating or trying to kind of fill in the gaps.

RS: I mean, okay I, in a moment of useful enthusiasm and misunderstanding, I worked for Cicados in Mexico, and wanted to paint murals and make great political pictures, okay? And I learned many things in the process, but one of the things was I ran into Frida Kahlo, who then was virtually unknown as a public figure. She was in the history books, in Breton's history of Surrealism, as the ribbon wrapped round the bomb. I mean she made it, she made a dramatic appearance here and then, but she was a footnote. And even in Mexico she was Diego's wife you know, and they were striking pictures, but she was treated as a kind of, you know, whatever. Now, to watch the history of the cult of Frida is an example of what's happened in those thirty years. It's an example that in some cases multiculturalism or attention to the situation of women and excluded artists has been not so progressive after all, it's become the vessel for a revival of the romantic artist myth, right? In other cases it signals a genuine

change of taste, and the emergence of Frida is an interesting, it's a crucial example of that in that she is both now. You know she's a fabulous artist always, she deserves the attention, and she's being loved to death for the wrong reasons. So I view all this…, I mean I'm old enough to have a fairly long vision, and since I'm historically minded I have by adoption an even longer one, and I think we're now in a very funny phase of the consolidation and increasingly conservative manifestations of once fresh thinking about all these things. I think post-modernism has become the new academy, it's the problem not the solution now, and that certain empirical attitudes need to re-assert themselves because otherwise it will simply become the next phase of what the old Greenbergian model is.

PON: Have you had any involvements with post-graduate training courses, either in your capacity as a curator or critic?

RS: Oh I've taught at Bard College of Art, on and off for about five or six years, and I taught at CUNIF almost the whole time I was at the Modern, and now I'm teaching at a full service graduate programme at the Institute of Fine Arts.

PON: Okay, and what kind of an impact do you think that those post-graduate training programmes have had on contemporary curating since 1987?

RS: Different. I think almost all of them run on too short a hop, that the amount of learning that needs to be done is a three to four year project rather than a two year one. And most of them are post-graduate two years - at least Bard is and I think a lot of them are. I think that many people who come to them really lack our history, but I don't mean academic art history but a sense of art history, a visual breadth of knowledge and an intellectual breadth of knowledge. They don't read widely enough, they read secondary and tertiary sources that organise material but they don't read primary sources. They don't know the narratives, the basic simple chronological sequence of events and so on. So they get into those programmes and they're asked to create constructs, and almost the only thing they can do under the circumstances is take a chunk of somebody else's theory and flesh it out with some new material. Or take a

word. I mean there are a lot of exhibitions now that essentially hang on a single word taken out of a single theoretical text. So I think there are a lot of them that are in big trouble because of that. Relatively few of them in my experience spend much time in galleries - I mean as I say in the galleries where they've been installed - so that the, the craft part of it is under-attended. And you know getting people comfortable with space, getting people to feel that space is a tool, is understandable, is incredibly eloquent if you use it well, is something that needs to be built in much more.

PON: Would you say they are ultimately 'a good thing'?

RS: Yes. I mean I think anything that gives people who… I mean, yeah I'm a Democrat, right, in the simple sense of the term, so the curatorial programmes are a way for people who are not going to go through the university training, may never break through those ranks - it gives them a chance to enter the world. They don't have to go through the shit work of being a secretary for ten years in order to you know become a junior curator or something like that. They can actually go direct, right, and I think that's good. But I think the programmes need to be very strong, and need to also understand that if, particularly in the cases of people who have not had wide exposure to visual culture prior to entering them, who come from disadvantaged places or from you know verbal families but not you know picture-looking families or whatever, you know there's a lot of work in the programmes that have to be structured so that people can pick that up, smart people will but you can't just count on it that they'll do it on their own.

PON: I mean, there is a problem between the idea of curating as something that can be learnt and something that can be taught. Do you think it can be either learnt or taught?

RS: Most people who go to curatorial programmes will probably not curate very much, and that's true of our schools, it's true of all professional schools pretty much, except lawyers and doctors in that sense you know. So if they're willing to take the gamble, then the ones who have the funny combination of temperament and aptitude that will make real curators have a very good chance and will come through.

Those who don't can be, you know can have positions in many parts of the art world based on what they will learn in the course of such programmes, you know, and I don't like to break hearts, so you know we have to be careful about how much you encourage certain people who you think really can't cut it, but one shouldn't be paternalistic either and say well don't do this you know.

PON: Second last question - can you tell me a bit about your final show at MOMA ?

RS: The last show I'm working on is a monographic show of Elizabeth Murray's work, which has been basically on the books for seven years, and at a certain point it was clear that it was not going to happen in the old building and then I said simply we will not do this in Queens. It's the first full scale monographic show devoted to a woman since Louise Bourgeois in 1982, which is not a good record. It's not a good record. There was…

PON: I think it's one of the arguments that Mary Anne Staniszewski actually makes in her critique of MOMA.

RS: She's right about that. Lynn Zelevansky and Laura Hoptman did together a Kusama show, which was very good but it was a sort of medium sized show and there was Louise's show that was done which also was a medium sized show. But there hasn't been one. And I said you're not going to do this to her, and you're not going to do this to a woman artist again. After all Louise's show was in the basement in the off year between construction or during construction - she didn't get the main galleries even then. So as a result of that it's sort of gone on a lot longer than probably would have been good. But it's going to happen in the fall, and then we'll see. She's unfortunately taken very ill just within the last two weeks, so that's a big issue now too, and she's, basically she has very advanced cancer.

PON: So what are your current and future projects that you're working on at the moment?

RS: I'm improvising, I mean in the last two years Pamela Kort and I did a show of Jörg Immendorff in Philadelphia, and I did Site Santa

Fe, and then Elizabeth, and then the Biennale, and then I think maybe I'll deserve my day of rest. I'm sure I'll have other projects in the works but I would kind of… I mean I haven't had a vacation in you know fifteen years, so I mean a week's vacation in fifteen years, so I'm getting ready for it.

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GILANE TAWADROS

London, 30-03-06

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator or is this a term that you're comfortable with?

GILANE TAWADROS: I didn't ever become a curator because when I started, the way the term is now, it wasn't a professional practice. I'm not completely comfortable with the term because I think that, in terms of its traditional sense of being a museum conservator, coming out of that world, I was never really part of that, and the way it's defined now is so open-ended but also I think it's too unspecific in terms of what that could mean.

PON: How would you define your practice as a curator when you are curating, as distinct from the curatorial practice of others?

GT: Well obviously the largest body of work that I have done was done at Iniva and in that context - an artist said to me when I left that Iniva was not an institution but a philosophy and so my way of working - I don't know if I would call it curating - is clearly about assembling and bringing together sets of ideas and the form in which those - orchestrating is not the right word - I'm struggling for the word to describe it, it's not assemblage, it's not orchestration, it's something in between, but it's about bringing together and presenting ideas which can then have a manifestation in different ways. I don't distinguish curating a book from curating a whole programme of events, you know, multimedia projects, an exhibition in the traditional sense, or site-specific projects. For me these are all forms of bringing into being and presenting and mediating sets of ideas which are then a launch pad and should be a point of engagement, dialogue or exchange.

PON: In the past fifteen to twenty years, in particular, there has been an unprecedented interest in what contemporary art curating may be or may potentially become. How do you think the role of the contemporary art curator has changed during that period and what are the dominant forms of curatorial practice that have emerged during that time?

GT: The key thing is that it's become a profession, and like all kinds of middle class professions, it now accrues a degree of status and privilege and it's sought after therefore, and I would call it a profession, not a practice.

PON: Would you call it a discipline perhaps in the way lecturing may be a discipline?

GT: No, I wouldn't call it a discipline, and for lecturing in that sense then it is only a discipline because of something called academia in which you can earn a living and on which you are dependent for that living, and in the same way I suppose curating is a discipline because you are in the art world and therefore there are sets of dependencies, in a sense that's what makes it also problematic, because those sets of dependencies and its professionalisation, which is what has happened in recent years, make it in some way a very limited discipline.

PON: What reasons would you put down for this professionalisation during that period?

GT: Well obviously the emergence of professional vocational training courses. The fact that it's recognised as something for which you can gain a qualification, the fact that the term is now used in every contemporary art institution as a tag, and as something to which people aspire - people don't aspire to being an exhibition organiser, they aspire to being a curator, so they are aspiring to a position of status and to a certain degree a certain notoriety. I think there's a culture of celebrity around curating, which makes it on a par with being in the media. It's perceived as a glamorous activity, and lots of travel and parties add to that kind of perception.

PON: One of the dominant forms that emerged during that period is the 'group exhibition'. Do you think the group exhibition is still the serious work of the curator?

GT: Not in a hierarchical way, not that it's more important than a solo exhibition, no. I mean, actually, I think it's much harder to do a retrospective project, especially when you deal as I often have with artists who are unknown, marginalised, never been represented by galleries. If you go to, usually a widow's house, and the paintings are being used as coffee tables and stuff is piled up to the door and no one has looked at the work for twenty years. In some ways, I'm really quite old-fashioned in that there is a very important role for the curator, in

terms of actually simply sorting through what a body of work represents and what it means, and organising it and editing it and documenting it. The projects that I've worked on sometimes took five years to realise, from concept to fruition. I think group exhibitions too are important, but I think they are more of a vehicle for articulating the curator's ideas really, than a vehicle for presenting a body of work, and I think that's the difference. You can of course present ideas through selection and how you choose, how you select and how you edit, and there's an editorial process at every stage of that, but it's not such a ringmaster situation.

PON: As part of the Baltic series of books on curating *The Producers*, you said 'The internationalization of the art world over the past decade has been accompanied by an increasing parochialism and conservatism on the part of national institutions, and it's significant that the proliferation of Biennales has projected a national competitive model, predominantly in favour of a cross-national themed show, which bring together artists from different cultural backgrounds under the same roof'. For Charles Esche and Vasif Kortun, 'the structure of the Biennale has become a tool to envisage or energise vision and discipline the imagination, and unlike the fixed institutional approach, displays a more vital role in the local context, curatorial vision in the context of Biennales can shape the way in which we form an understanding of global culture'. How do you think that biennials are shaping global culture and how significant have curators been in taking on such issues?

GT: That's a big one! I think Vasif and Charles' Biennial in Istanbul last year was a brilliant project and I thought that the coherence of that project, the sensitivity of spaces that they gave to artists' work, the way they orchestrated the dialogue between work, the sites that they chose, which were a commentary, which were significant both in terms of that Biennial, what the feeling was in terms of exploring the city of Istanbul in its own specificities, but also a commentary on previous Biennials, where curators were lured and charmed and seduced by the possibility of the spectacle of these amazing backdrops for presenting work, was brilliant. But I don't think that's the norm, I would say that for me that was an exception as a biennial and most are not like that. I think, while there was a really difficult context in which to work. I've now had two experiences, and I can only access in relation to Venice and

Brighton in terms of actually being an agent rather than a viewer. I think there are opportunities to do things in biennials, but my view now is that that opportunity is really about going against the grain in the way that Vasif and Charles did, than what most biennials do. So for me going against the grain involves not showing lots and lots of artists, even not showing new artists or new work. At Brighton I'm going to be showing some extremely well known people, and bodies of work that are really old, and for me I want to get away from this idea that it's about discovering new talent and putting that on show, which then, you can't get away from the marketplace, I don't believe that there's a space which is somehow pure and unsullied where you can do your independent curatorial thing and that you are somehow on a higher moral or ethical ground in curatorial terms. I'm not saying that there aren't strategies and ways of making interventions outside the mainstream, that's not what I mean. I think that you have to be cognizant of the market and your implication in that, and knowing that, to act in ways which, to think for yourself, what it is that you are able to and want to do within that context, being very self-aware of the implications of your actions and interventions, because with biennials there is no coincidence that the growth of biennials coincides with the process of growth of globalisation, with art becoming part of that globalised economy with the necessity for new markets, with the growth of new markets to sell work, but also of new products, to continue to fuel and invigorate existing markets, not to mention all the regeneration of cities and the way that art is being used and biennials in particular, and festivals of art, are used as a form of accumulating cultural capital, as a strategy for cities and you have to be cognizant of those things. Yes it is possible to make interventions, but I think it's very difficult.

PON: The two aspects of globalisation that Francesco Bonami took on board and articulated in Venice 2003 were the issue of 'multitude and fragmentation', which were mirrored in the selection of twelve so-called independent curators being employed to curate sections of it. How successful as a model do you think that was?

GT: It's kind of a cop out. In a way Michael Hardt and Toni Negri's book *Empire* was a way to avoid talking about the really political questions that globalisation represents, the really difficult issues, and their own implication within it, and so in a way, to talk about fragmentation and

multitude is just a way to sidestep in the same way that people are talking about post-race, or post-gender, all these sidesteps are actually rather invidious ways to avoid engaging politically, and I think that's partly what's going on.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents or precursors have been an influence on your practice?

GT: That's another difficult question. I suppose the way that certain artists operated, and intellectuals. I'm interested in people like David Medalla and SIGNALS and those kinds of initiatives, which were ahead of their time. David is a one man revolution and for me is a really important figure, because I think he's constantly challenging institutional norms and practices, but he is extremely sensitive to artists themselves and listens to artists and is incredibly open and generous with artists which is truly, truly democratic in the way that people pretend to be but really aren't, and he gets criticised for that, but actually it's part of his recognition that an artistic endeavor is really, truly democratic, it really is Duchampian in the true sense of the word, not a pretend version like Palais de Tokyo and there are lots of bad examples - let's mess it up and let's graffiti on the walls. I am also interested intellectually in people like James Baldwin and Stuart Hall. To be honest, I'm not sure that curating is sufficiently rigorous, in that sense I don't think it's a discipline, I don't think it's sufficiently rigorous or has had sufficient time or interrogation or challenge to itself. If we are saying that this sphere began in 1987, I don't think that's long enough really for there to exist sufficient models or possibilities.

PON: The exhibition of 'Magiciens de la Terre' in 1989, regardless of its faults was the place in which contemporary African art made its first appearance in Europe. How significant an influence was this event upon later, more integrated or integral global exhibitions such as 'Documenta 11' in 2002 or even Francesco Bonami's Venice in 2003?

GT: 'Magiciens de la Terre' was significant in the sense that it engaged positions and it engendered a critique of what was wrong with it, and that was really important and it engendered a debate about the inclusion and exclusion and strategies of including and excluding artists from different parts of the world that has had huge impact, but it's not that alone,

there's a whole discourse that kind of built up. Journals like *Third Text* I think have been more important than 'Magiciens de la Terre' and engagement with it shortfalls. It also acted as a trigger point, and trigger points are really important because they bring about those conditions and positions and then people try and do things that are different. In terms of Iniva, it really informed the decision - at that time it made sense, now probably, eleven years on doesn't sound as relevant or appropriate - that it was to be focused on what we called a metropolitan practice, i.e. that it wasn't about so called traditional forms and the reason for that was that there were so many exhibitions at that time that represented non-Western cultural practices, in a way that seemed to dissolve completely any questions of chronology, form, context, anything at all, and there still is, to a certain extent, a difference, in a way in which what's considered rigorous curatorial practice when dealing with European artists seems to get thrown out of the window when you are dealing with artists who are not coming from Europe and North America.

PON: In *The Power of Display, History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls an art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think that this amnesia has affected the way in which we perceive contemporary art curation? She is talking both specifically and generally about the role taken up by artists through innovative exhibitionary displays, particularly during the laboratory years, people like El Lissitzky, Lilly Reich, Kiesler or even Duchamp's exhibition interventions with the Surrealists, Alfred Barr, Alexander Dorner etc. and how their role as exhibition designers and as innovative curatorial practitioners has been somehow been emptied out of early modernist projects, whereby the artwork as object was given precedence in the chronological development from artist to artist.

GT: I think that's really true. You can go back further than that, and look at the way Malevich hung his paintings in 'The Last Futurist Exhibition of Paintings' in 1915-16. I think that is true and I think though in this context, one has to refer to the growth of, it's not just of the profession but as an industry, where not only were the curators now in a professional role, but architects are employed to design, and professional designers are employed to design exhibitions spaces, and it came as no surprise to me to learn that the architect with whom the

Hayward worked very closely then subsequently went on to design big Emporio Armani flagships in New York, and the fact is that it's part of a continuum in terms of what's happened to - the stakes are much bigger, and the regime of display has to conform with a certain set of standards of spectacle and presentation, that now don't leave much room for an artist to intervene, and now it is artist-curators, people like Jens Hoffmann, who now are kind of reclaiming this space, but they're reclaiming it as part of their authorial position as curator, which is fine, but it's not collaborative entirely.

PON: One level you've got people like architect David Adjaye as the ever present figure within so called British contemporary art exhibitions, but on another level you've got people like Hans Ulrich Obrist who have been collaborating continually with architects on designing the space for exhibition, but then you also have artists like Josef Dabernig, Liam Gillick, Julie Ault, Judith Barry working on the display structures and designs for exhibitions. We seem to be in a moment where artists are again working as architects, as exhibition designers, as display designers and so on.

GT: But why are they being employed? Is it about differentiating one exhibition from another? Is it about, is it in a sense another artwork, but as a frame, a particular frame, so it's a kind of continuation of the curatorial project, which remains under curatorial control? Is it about intellectual, conceptual continuity, with the content of the show? I'm not sure. It's different obviously in each situation.

PON: Are there any current projects or initiatives you think are breaking new ground curatorially?

GT: I already mentioned the 'Istanbul Biennial', which I thought was a very significant initiative, in terms of biennial kind of work. I do think Jens' programme at the ICA is really interesting within a Kunsthalle-type contemporary art space. You see my problem comes back to what I was saying earlier about curating being a discipline, because to me, the production, showmanship, orchestration of a one-off project, to me it can't be separated from an ongoing programme. I want to see it as part of an ongoing project, an intellectual project, and I'm interested in that kind of perspective and I think you can only do that over a long period of

time, and it's very difficult for an individual to do that. I think it's more possible to do that within an institutional framework, and that's why I talked about Iniva as a philosophy and not an institution, in the same way I would say that I have difficulty with the term 'curatorial practice'. What are we talking about? Are we talking about an artistic practice, are we talking about an intellectual practice, are we talking about political projects? Over what period of time does that have to be sustained? How many projects do you need, how big do they have to be, how big do the budgets need to be in order to enable one to be able to make sense, in a way to really understand it as a discipline?

PON: When I asked Okwui Enwezor the same question he said 'I must put in a word for the work of Iniva in London. I think that it's a great model through this kind of agency format Gilane Tawadros has been able to produce some very productive and important historical work. The exhibitions they've organised in different institutions since they were founded, and also their publications have been incredibly important. I really don't know of any other comparable institution of contemporary art really doing the kind of work that's been produced by Iniva. I like the fact that Iniva has really been able to do these sorts of arts exhibitions and really remained in significantly stable ground as they negotiate the process of introducing a discourse, an artistic discourse'. But he was also fearful of what may happen to this agency model when Iniva and Autograph occupied their new building together. Do you think there is a danger this agency aspect of the organisation could be taken over by a more traditional approach to exhibition making?

GT: Yes, I do. I think it's a very real danger. But there are pressures on any organisation when it gets to a certain point of evolution, where there's a momentum and a trajectory created by the size of an organisation, how long it's been in existence, the expectations not only of artists but of funders, the pressures that exist to conform to a conventional model, because institutions are benchmarked by funding bodies against usually established models, so if you don't conform to those, there are continuous pressures on Iniva to conform to a very particularly conventional model, when actually the value we are adding to the cultural landscape was described to me from the ways in which it didn't conform. But it becomes increasingly difficult to sustain that against these pressures and those pressures are a result of what's happened in the arts

funding field in this country and to a greater or lesser extent, in other places, where diversification of funding revenue is now, not just a requirement, but an absolute demand from government and public sector, and that in itself has an incredibly very particular impact on an organisation like Iniva. If you want to attract sponsorship, it's about press coverage, it's about what kind of artists you need to show, how they are validated and if you can attract them to work with you and so on. So, yes, of course the building will constrain Iniva and will be a challenge. The challenge is if Iniva is able to challenge the convention of the institutional model as much when it is in the building, and I think there are really exciting ways you can really do that actually. It hasn't been done. Really, all sorts of things potentially one can do that are really quite radical, if the appetite, the vision and the sheer desire is there, it would take a lot to do that, as well as its appetite for risk too, because it's about alienating the very people that fund you or potentially might fund you in the future.

PON: There are three curators that come to my mind when thinking about new institutional models that have been tried: Charles Esche at Rooseum in Malmo, Catherine David at Witte de With and Maria Lind at the Kunstverein in Munich, and all three attempted to transform the institution into an exploratory space that as part laboratory, agency, meeting place, academy, user space for artists, and a place that was actually constantly evolving through the presence of people in the building as well as doing projects that stretched over a long period of time, and all three have now left these institutions perhaps due to internal pressures, but certainly not without criticism locally.

GT: I think it's very difficult. I think it's incredibly difficult.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making, as opposed to more traditional forms of curator as mediator, as conservator, as builder of collections. How do you see your role as a curator and at what level of the artistic production do you see your practice being involved in the process of art making?

GT: Well I'm quite clear that I'm not an artist. I have no aspirations to be an artist. If I had wanted to be an artist I would have been an

artist! I'm not an artist. However, it is possible to curate as a process, modeled on the process of making art. I also don't think that artists or art making, art production happens in a vacuum, nor that the points of engagement are always obvious or transparent and so again, I probably see my role really as creating the conditions in which artworks and ideas can be seen and engaged with, and I think that is an important role, I think it is an important role, I don't think it's the same as being an artist. It's about listening to the artist, it's about, for me it was really, really important at Iniva that the artistic process was central and was the focus and that Iniva responded to that. It was not an attempt to bundle up or to use artists and artwork as a way to illustrate a set of ideas, but to be true and there was an integrity to artistic practice and artistic ideas, and even group exhibitions or thematic shows at Iniva were a response to what artists were actually doing, rather than an orchestration of that, like saying to artists 'oh, I'm doing this about this, can you make something to fit?' and that was always the case, and Iniva was one of the first organisations, arts organisations, really to treat artistic practice as a form of knowledge production, and that came out because a number of artists would work at Iniva, and develop programmes like the Artist in Research programme, and it was very much a collaborative institution, a kind of space for lots of curators, there is always pressure for there to be a star curator and that's why I always resisted the term curator, and why the institution had to be a space in which lots of curatorial voices, as well as lots of artistic voices, and lots of critical voices, could find a space. But my point is that the practice is about not being an artist, or replicating artistic practice, but it is recognising and deploying for me is a better word, deploying what is very specific and unique about artistic practice, and I would say it's things like the capacity of the artwork to create an area of discomfort or disorientation, which in a funny way helps you then to re-orientate or to focus on something, to notice things that you otherwise wouldn't notice by drawing your attention to something, sometimes very small, it could be colour or the way the light falls or it could be something really sensual and physical. It's about deploying that aspect of art, which is about a form of cognition, which happens at a level, in a sense before the rational and the intellectual. Of course the rational and the intellectual are part of the experience, (although it's not always), but your understanding often occurs first on a sensual level whether it be sight, sound, touch, or all of those at the same time, and

therefore the capacity of the artwork to communicate operates in a very, very different way to language, to reading a book, to being in a lecture or receiving information and communication in different ways. So it's about the climate. I've always had a really strong belief that artists take soundings from the environment around them, the nature of artistic practice is in some ways a kind of removal, although of course I'm not saying that artists are not a completely active and integral part of society and culture in every way, in a very real material sense, but there is a disengagement, there is a removal from the day-to day-in order to reconnect with the day-to-day in a more intense way, and that, those are the strategies, those are the things that I think programming, which I prefer to curating as a word, are about, rather than assuming the role of an artist.

PON: Do you think that we need more post-graduate curating courses and institutionally led training programmes?

GT: [Laughs] That's an evil question! I think we need more forums in which there can be discussion and debate about why we are producing exhibitions, to what end, and why we are producing cultural institutions, which is a different thing.

PON: There was a moment, about five years ago, when biennials were being heavily critiqued because of their homogenising potentiality. More recently there seems to be a complete turnaround where biennials, because of their heterogeneity in many respects - they're all different - and they may actually be a very productive space for the exhibition of more diverse cultural practices. What would your position be on the expansion of biennials?

GT: Same answer as really what I just said. It's about content not quantity, and it's about the function of those biennials, and what you do with them. It's the same as saying, 'do we need any more exhibition spaces?' Not if they are just reproducing themselves, doing the same thing and cloning themselves, then what's the point, then that becomes proliferation without any change or specific value or particularity, and that's the issue for me and how you can create different possibilities, not strictly reproducing the same thing over and over again. So yes, we can have more biennials, but only if they're doing something different or

they're somehow making a difference. Making a difference, that's the key thing.

PON: Last question. You have answered an aspect of this question in many ways and it is a general non-specific question. Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is, and how would you describe a good curated art exhibition?

GT: I think, yes, there are examples of bad curating. There are examples of bad curating and there are examples of good curating, but again my concern would be not to think about evaluating one-off projects, but actually of having a longer term and more in-depth approach, which would look at a body of work or a set of strategies, or in a sense interrogate the intellectual and conceptual basis for curatorial practice over time, and over a number of projects. We're allowed to fail, we're all allowed to make mistakes, institutions do things badly, individuals do things badly from time to time, but I'm more interested in what an accumulation of practice adds up to or doesn't, rather than a single one off project.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

ERIC TRONCY

28-10-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How did you become a curator? Are you comfortable with this term? What is your curatorial background?

ERIC TRONCY: I was studying History of Arts at La Sorbonne in Paris, in the Ecole du Louvre and the Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, studying sociology of the art market with Raymonde Moulin who was very close to Howard Becker. I had no specific idea of what I would do later with that (writing, exhibiting, curating). Then in the late 80's I met a group of artists; Philippe Parreno, Liam Gillick, Angela Bulloch, Pierre Huyghe, Henry Bond, Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster, etc. and everything became more clear. I was certainly not an artist myself, but I wanted to make their ideas visible. I then started to write about art, and curating was like a logical way to go on with the writing. Then I felt involved in a much larger history, history of exhibitions, and I tried to learn about it, to understand it, and to deal with it.

PON: How do you see the role of the contemporary art curator? How would you define your practice?

ET: The role of the contemporary art curator is extraordinarily variable. In the situation of organising a solo show, the curator often is nothing but a cheque book (that's what artists expect nowadays from a good curator for their solo shows: money). Group shows the way people usually understand them, I do not feel concerned.

My practice is shared between organising solo shows in Le Consortium in Dijon, in this case, I give as much freedom to the artist as my budget allows me to do. And the other side of my practice now drove me to do these 3 exhibitions without artists, then in these cases I felt my role was to give already known artworks a second life, a second chance, provide them with a new situation, a temporary one. In this process, I involve everything I know about the way art works, really exist in the real world, the way they are exhibited by artists, and the way they end up in collectors' apartments displayed so that they match with the colour of the curtains or the sofa.

PON: Do you think there are dominant forms of curatorial practice that have developed over the last 15-20 years? What are they?

ET: Of course the curatorial practice that emerged in the last decades was linked with the development of biennials, and this really ridiculous idea that you have to travel and bring back new things home. Pretty stupid in the global communication age.

PON: Why did you change from curating predominantly with artists to working predominantly with artworks in the mid-nineties?

ET: When I started to get interested in art, and then started to write and organise exhibitions, there was obviously something to do for the artists I had been interested in. A sort of fight had to take place. And I was ready for the battle. When I did 'No Man's Time' at the Villa Arson, National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Nice, 1991, I wanted to show the works of artists that were not shown in France at all: Raymond Pettibon, Jim Shaw, Felix Gonzalez Torres, Allen Ruppersberg, Karen Kilimnik, Pruitt & Early, Philippe Parreno, Xavier Veilhan, and so on. This is really what it was about; showing things that would take the place of what (the crap) was shown in France at that time.

Then in the middle of the nineties, it was obvious an entire situation had changed. There was no need for a fight anymore, artists were more quickly proposed to exhibit everywhere, and actually a lot of people wanted to show the same artists. Also, artists started not to need curators anymore, but a great budget. They wanted to be invited to the Prada Foundation, to do the showcases at the Vuitton shop, and to have their face instead of their works printed in glossy magazines. Of course, this invites you, as a curator, to slightly modify your behaviour.

PON: Is the group exhibition still the serious work of the curator?

ET: As you know, my own definition of what a group show could be is slightly specific. When I do group shows, like the 3 I did between 1995 and 2003, 'Dramatically Different', National Centre for Contemporary Arts, Grenoble, 1995 'Weather Everything', Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst Leipzig, 1996, 'Coollustre', Collection Lambert, Avignon, 2003, I consider it a very serious part of what a curator's work is. 'Coollustre' took me 5 years to put together, and I think this is

probably what doing a great show requires. For me, the serious work of a curator is to have unexpected ideas, to avoid subjects, and to propose a temporary experience of art that does not explain what the artworks are, but tries to be at the same level as the artworks themselves. It is about providing the viewer with questions, not with answers. It is about considering the viewer (as a person), not the audience (as a whole). It is about making the viewer able to feel the very complexity of what art is, and be lost in it, and be somehow humiliated by it.

PON: What past curatorial models, exhibitions, historical precedents, or precursors have been an influence on your practice as a cuartor?

ET: Some old shows by Jeffrey Deitch, some Bob Nickas shows from the eighties, 'The Red Show', the shows made with artists whose name was starting with the same letter, Disneyland, the display of goods in shops, the text 'Temporary Autonomy Zone' by Hakim Bey, the exhibition 'This is Tomorrow' (including Richard Hamilton's contribution to it) at the Whitechapel in 1956, the international exhibition of Surrealism in Paris in 1938. And, of course and particularly the works and shows of: Katharina Fritsch, Andy Warhol, Allan McCollum, Haim Steinbach, Bertrand Lavier, Robert Gober. A good artist is necessary also a good curator for his own work, and these ones had visions about what a show could be that tell us a lot about exhibiting in general.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights a kind of art historical 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practices of the past, in particular the laboratory years from 1920s-50s and the curatorial role played by people such as Alexander Dorner, Frederick Kiesler, El Lissitzky, Herbert Bayer, Lilly Reich, Alfred H. Barr etc. Do you think this amnesia has affected the way we perceive contemporary art curating?

ET: Yes, definitely.

PON: How do you think curators could address this historical amnesia?

ET: Studying history of exhibitions.

PON: What current curatorial projects or initiatives do you think are breaking new ground?

ET: The ones who consider art as a language in itself, and do not try to translate it in another language.

PON: Curators are now seen as a creative component within the production and mediation of artworks through exhibition making, how do you see your role as a curator and at what level of artistic production do you see your practice being involved within the process of art making?

ET: None. Harald Szeemann used to say he was, 'the one who makes things possible' and that was probably true at some stage of his carreer. But now, if I, as a curator, don't make things possible, someone else will do. I then have no function in the art industry (assuming that what used to be conveniently described as 'the art field' is now an industry).

PON: The term 'performative curating' is used by Maria Lind and Søren Grammel to describe a self-reflexive curatorial practice, associated with certain kinds of contemporary art projects where the curatorial strategy is made apparent. Do you think performativity is a useful term for critical forms of curating?

ET: To make the curatorial strategy of a show apparent is the minimum each one would normally require when curating a show.

PON: A key word used by Seth Siegelaub to clarify the changing role as a curator in the late sixties was 'demystification'. How relevant do you think this term is to evaluating contemporary curatorial practice?

ET: Of course, I would rather myself pray for a 're-mystification'. The late sixties necessities can't be the 21st century ones, that would mean the art field in itself hasn't changed. The democratisation of the access to art has made people think that art had to be understood by

everyone, and then the artworks have turned to very basic evidences of purpose. In consequence, shows often look like lessons (a subject, and the curator's answer to the subject) and art in itself becomes like an ordinary thing, an ordinary experience, somehow satisfying. But we all know the relationships we have with the elements of knowledge are more sophisticated than this, more complex. And if I mention this idea of 're-mystification', it has to do with the idea that a show should re-introduce more complexity in art than art itself allows himself to do.

PON: Do you think a curated exhibition can be a work of art in itself?

ET: Who cares, really? Believe me, I think this question is specially irrelevant. What would that change if a show could be considered an artwork? And what if not? I think artists are very afraid that shows could be more generous, complex and sophisticated than their own production - here is the problem. For now, let's say an artwork is obviously something that you can sell. And no one has yet bought an entire show by a curator. So let's say a show can't be called an artwork.

PON: Do you think of curating as a form of artistic practice?

ET: Curating and making art have something in common, you have to have talent to do it. But would you wonder if a great meal by a wonderful chef is a work of art in itself? You just enjoy your meal, and if you're into it you try to understand the way it's done, the way it's cooked, the elements involved and try to compare it to previous manners to deal with these elements.

PON: Can we or should we evaluate what good or bad curating is? How would you describe a good curated art exhibition?

ET: Isn't art about evaluation anyway? A good curated exhibition could be one that makes you feel desire.

PON: Do you think we need more post-graduate curating courses and institutionally-led curatorial training programmes? Have you any involvement with such courses in France or elsewhere?

ET: I am absolutely sure of something; making art is not something you learn, and curating is the same. The only way to understand a bit of all this is to learn the history of art, and the history of exhibitions. Providing students with information is the only thing I do when I do lectures, or when I teach in Switzerland. But even a tremendously vast knowledge of history does not give you talent, faith, and grace.

PON: Do you need any more international art biennials?

ET: Of course not. I think we need less biennials and more shows.

PON: How important is the role of criticism to the practice of curating? This is a deliberately open-ended question.

ET: I assume a movie director would not change his way of directing because he gets a bad review.

PON: What is the future for curating?

ET: Time will tell. Artists will show the way, and knowing what they showed us, we'll go in the opposite direction. That will be the good one.

END OF TAPE


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GAVIN WADE

London, 02-06-05

PAUL O'NEILL: How do you see the role of the contemporary art curator, how would you define the relationship between curator and artistic production within your own practice?

GAVIN WADE: I don't have a fixed idea of the role of the curator, I see it as still an open position and I think that's how I've moved into it. As I have been curating projects I don't see any restrictions, I don't see the rules, I hear people talking about them as if there are all these specific roles and ways and they seem outside of what I have to think about, they're always like the last thing somehow. So I like to think that it's a kind of growth and at certain points you do try to define it in projects but every time I try and define what it is in relation to my practice, the more you single down what the difference is between curating - to being a curator and being an artist, I end up with coming to the same point, that when you push it and when you really try to make out what the difference is, there is no difference. The only thing I think is that somehow the artist and the art are primary and the notion of curating and being a curator has to be secondary and so it always comes down to the fact that really you're an artist and it's art, that the role of the curator is to make art.

PON: Do you make a distinction between projects which could be called say more traditional, like curated with other artists, would you make a distinction between that work and the work where you make support structures where you exhibit and show other works that you may not have selected?

GW: Yes I do feel it, I mean it doesn't happen as often I suppose, the traditional role, just because of projects that I get myself into but the last time that I very clearly felt that difference was when I curated the 'Black Tent' project by Nathan Coley, in 2003 at Portsmouth Cathedral. Really I think that was because of the way that Nathan wanted to work. I was invited to curate a project at the Cathedral and I felt compelled to ask Nathan if he wanted to make a new work there, it seemed so connected to his practice so much, the fact that he'd made about five projects in relation to places of worship but he'd never actually made an artwork within one. I just thought that was the most interesting thing to do and the most relevant person I could ask and it was up to him, whether that was wrong for him to actually go and do a

project in a place of worship or whether this would become some kind of, like the end of that research in a way, maybe this was the last time. And Nathan's really clear about what he wants a curator to do for him and he's clear about what his work is and he doesn't require me to collaborate with him on the production of the work, he requires me to do tasks that mean that the work is going to get into position and I was happy to operate in that way although I felt a really strong connection with the work that he produced. A massive connection and I can't really explain what that is except that some of the references he was picking up and referring to, the history of abstraction going back to Malevich and referencing that in relation to structures that God had 'spoken' in the Bible and they became so compatible with Nathan's work. The tabernacle idea combined with Malevich's suprematism and with other examples of 20th century abstraction, they all fell so easily into place and made this new tent system, new abstract sculpture that would be a new phase of architecture for the Cathedral which had already had 5 phases over 900 years. So I just felt a very close affinity with all of Nathan's thinking on it I suppose.

PON: When you wrote 'Artist + curator = ' for *A-N Magazine* in 1999 there seems to be an attempt to define a relatively barren discourse around curatorial projects that were being designed, produced or organised by artists. Do you think that 'artist-curator' is still a term that carries the same weight that it made then?

GW: I think people have got used to it now and feel it much easier to accept or dismiss as if it's been talked about and written about enough for them to just say 'oh yeah'. It's still, you know, it's kind of insignificant in relation to the weight of the art market and I think a lot of people who may have become artist-curators five years ago just opened galleries and would be less inclined to talk about what they do as curator and just more inclined to try to bring in young artists into their gallery and present them in a very traditional way. So the artist-curator position hasn't changed that much, it's still a possibility, it's still slightly outside of and an alternative in some ways to the majority of the art production that's going on.

PON: In *Curating in the 21st Century* published in 2001 you began your own essay with the question of 'how does the curator provide for the

future?' Do you have any particular answers to this question?

GW: Well the one answer that I am still trying to achieve really was just about altering some systems of ways that are available to take as a curator. Particularly projects happening over longer periods of time that pursue much more of a cumulative process of action, such as post-planning and gradual understanding. I still think that somehow curators aren't pursuing that enough, that they're still thinking in terms of a schedule, a planning schedule of how a gallery or museum works and that when one thing leaves another thing comes in and that there's still not enough relationship there between different parts in time. I still think somehow that time is a really central aspect of what curators are in positions to be able to do, they actually have the power to be able to change something like that, that could be quite subtle in some institutions but I think it would have a really big knock on effect and there's very few projects historically that work cumulatively, that deal with accumulating and response to previous works. I think that it's a really under developed field that does still bring out really great things when it happens. People get very excited and new works and new ideas emerge, you can see them happening somehow because of direct response to previous situations and artworks. The idea of treating artworks as context, to make something new in relation to art as context so that it's not removed, like being a critic or a writer, where manifestation happens completely separate from the work, you are working directly on top of the previous work and exhibitions work directly in relation to what came before. There could be more of a sense of building and generating over a period of time. So I mean I've been trying to do that with some publication projects and some physical projects, landscape projects that I've still yet to achieve.

PON: Is that a position in response to what Mary Ann Staniszewski calls an 'amnesia' towards innovative exhibitionary display practice of the past and are you suggesting the kind of potentiality for curating somehow embodying its repressed history or is somehow kind of responding to this amnesia?

GW: I think that my ideas emerged out of the period when I was aware of that sort of 'amnesia' and looking at earlier 20th century exhibition design but I don't think I was so literally thinking that they were

connected but in some ways I think it would tackle that by making something that's happening now, you would still be able to refer to 10 years ago and to 20 years ago and you would see a lineage of ideas and things that you're denying and taking away and criticising and things could appear and disappear but they would always be known in the space. And somehow that happens anyway for me when you go into a gallery and you've seen twenty shows there, I still look around the space and I remember what was there before and it starts to blur but I think it's a really healthy thing that the galleries could be emphasising, they're not making sense of that, so it's like some kind of time issue that they're just denying within the space. So I think it would do what you're suggesting, it would connect up with that history but I think probably early, I mean I think El Lissitzky's projects probably almost had that built into them, the idea of the room, the abstract cabinet that would be able to be changed and then he would do another version of it, it would have this history built in. That probably wasn't at the forefront of the ideas with him but it kind of implies that.

PON: *Curating in the 21st Century* was an essential publication at the time and perhaps still is but at a time when there was very little serious writing on curating as a development within critical discourse. How do you think this discourse has developed since that publication?

GW: I don't think there's been that much significant, I don't think there's been a significant development in terms of the texts that are out there. There's been a lot of lightweight versions of that approach somehow but I haven't seen a text that has impacted on me say as much as Jeremy Millar's text in *Curating in the 21st Century*, which I haven't seen anyone take that on in the way that he took on the idea of what art and curating could be in relation to life, in relation to a very large scale idea. Maybe it's too scary what he almost proposes and people feel insignificant within it or feel unable to act, maybe it gives you nothing to fight against when someone proposes there is no difference between the different scales of production going on.

PON: Someone like Hans Ulrich Obrist or Nicholas Bourriaud refer to Deleuze's idea of rhizome as an approach to curatorial knowledge, the idea of curating having a central branch that branches out into all

these different areas or in exhibition, this tree like structure which kind of has folds between the different branches which kind of does relate to this organic structure, it's like we have an organic structure, an exhibition constantly evolving constantly changing and the role has been kind of shifting between different branches or positions.

GW: I think that's there also within my text in *Curating in the 21st Century*, that's there as an underpinning principle of the Quick Response Unit, a way of production that can fit into any system and potentially dealing in a very aggressive way. It's sort of saying that we can solve any situation and the art is brought in to deal with the situation. I was imagining that it's not enough, the opportunities that are already there are not enough for me or for any other artist or curator, we want more. It was almost like that and I still believe that and it totally makes sense with this kind of spreading out and growing and becoming other things through working out new systems. Why I was interested in Buckminster Fuller's writings is because it picks up on that principle, it picks up on systems and structures and how they progress outside of something like an art field or a science field or anything else, how they fit into all aspects of life. I think after I was writing about Quick Response Unit, even though I had read some of Fuller's texts before that, was when I really clicked this idea of him as a comprehensivist. He decided that he wanted to be an average individual who could apply himself to anything in the world and he could be brought into any situation and he could have something to say and it could give him a part to play along with other people. The comprehensivist is an anti-specialist idea that he was trying to pick up on and he said that that's because nature isn't about specialisation or when it is things don't work anymore and extinction would be one example of that. He has this wonderful kind of discursive rambling nature of his ideas that suddenly slot into somewhere else and so I see that as a beautiful model of how to act, that you follow an idea intuitively and then it fits into a certain situation. Then you try and analyse that and take that apart until you've produced a work and the work leads to the next stage. And so my 'Strategic Questions' project which comes out of Fuller's questions, for me I didn't know what it was going to be but it's been an amazing structure because it's so open and literally that it tries to fit into forty existing systems in the

world, tries to infiltrate them in various ways by working with artists to produce a work that's published and spreads out. And each time it's published it's hitting a different system, hitting a different group of people and it's hitting different contexts every single time and I'm hoping still that it spreads much further than I've already been able to manage and outside of art world systems because sometimes it is hard to get out of the art world.

PON: 'Speculation' and 'strategy' are key words that are often used in relation to your practice, what are the speculative activities that you think you are involved in and what are your particular strategies or are these just terms that are used loosely?

GW: I think the speculative parts are often sometimes embedded into the principles of exhibitions. I think the 'Let's Get to Work' project in the United States, that was 2000 and 2001, was really pursuing the idea of a variety of people coming together to develop a city. Artists would play different roles in the city and that essentially was a speculative project on whether I could bring together thirty artists and they could collaborate or not collaborate and how their works would fit together and could function as a plan, that they could develop a plan together and I think that that is a speculative practice, something that I don't feel like I've got to the next step yet, I think that that's still there to be discovered because as I was doing that around, over the last five years, just because of the connection of artists to regeneration and artists to building houses etc, it felt like it became more and more of a public issue and it's made it muddy water somehow about the kind of backlash against the use of artists as social workers within a situation or as band aids or when an artist just becomes a designer. So I still think there's work there to be done in terms of clarifying how the artists work in those situations and also literally that we still haven't got an after effect, no artist has made a city.

PON: Rirkrit Tiravanija's 'Land' project potentially as a small island of utopian activity or using a small area of land, which has its own kind of criteria for cultural and exploratory existence.

GW: Without having visited it, from my perspective Rirkrit's piece

looks like it's got a lot of integrity, it looks like it's functioning without needing for me to go there and that feels like it's got integrity. I've heard other people talk about it where they don't see integrity, they see certain exploitation which I would need to see evidence of. But I mean the artists who were instrumental in thinking about the 'Let's Get To Work' project are Arakawa & Gins in New York and they are building living unit villages in Japan at the moment, I'm hoping to go over to see how that is going on and they kind of invited me into part of that development and they, from the 80s, were imagining how to develop a city and that that city would have very powerful effects on people, that's what they believe, I kind of felt compelled to ally myself with those people who had that, this incredible kind of slightly unbelievable vision.

PON: Do you think curating is a 'speculative practice' or has potential to be a speculative practice?

GW: Yes. I think so because the way that I approach it is that it's always pinpointing a number of components or elements that are there to be used as springboards for the next thing, and then some of the projects like 'Strategic Questions' is defining a longer term strategy to make that happen, a strategy for completely unknown situations and that when something comes up I've got a structure in place to apply to it, as soon as somebody says oh you want to do this or here is a fascinating situation, I've already got something there that's open to kind of bend itself.

PON: In a sense the system or the structure is a kind of flexible structure in itself, not something that's kind of, it's not something that's limiting?

GW: I think I was really aware of that because I could feel that there was and could be criticism of an artist-curator who comes in with something to give to an artist and say do something with that and like I mean the early project in 1998 that I did, this little show called '2in1x4+1' at One in the Other gallery, that was totally speculative because I didn't know what would happen, I just thought that this what I will do, I will build a structure and give the structure to an artist and say can you make a work with that for the show. That was the

curatorial input, the physical structure, and they would decide how it all goes together and get on with the next bit and one artist who I approached decided not to do it, they felt quite uncomfortable with it and four artists were very happy to do that and although one of the artists actually rejected the structure he had still made the work and his rejection of the structure sort of made sense within the project, it was the contradiction, the acknowledgement of this problem within it. But I still felt that it was actually, it's all about how that's done and it's about trust and in the end I hope it's a generous thing and it's not about trying to limit or pinpoint somebody or something, it's about having a discussion as a way of producing work.

PON: What do you think are the differences between exhibition design and curatorial practice or curating in practice?

GW: I think that exhibition design is a tool of curatorial practice which can exist as a separate thing that you use but the only time when it's part of the same impulse is when it's imagined right from the start, i.e. when the exhibition design is the curatorial strategy or is part of the environment to speculate, that you can make an environment, knowing that that environment is going to affect artists or visitors or whoever else in a certain way, you want it to control the situation in a certain way. So it can be the same but I think the biggest difference is only in a more traditional situation where a curator is a storyteller, the curator is a writer really, and not somebody who deals with space and then they would employ an exhibition designer to make sense of their storytelling in relation to space which is the kind of classic early 20th century model as well, especially a museum but it would always be kind of separated.

PON: What you seem to be suggesting is that exhibition design is certainly part of curating in practice, while curating is not necessarily part of an exhibition design.

GW: Yes I don't think it's intrinsically part of it, I think you could get an amazing exhibition designer who has no interest in the curatorial aspects at all and they only want to deal spatially. I think why I even wanted to be a curator or to curate exhibitions was that I was interested in how to organise spaces and how to organise things and

spaces that generated meaning, and that was with my own objects that I was making but I felt didn't feel, it didn't seem enough that I would make something and I'd place that into a situation, it didn't feel complex enough somehow, it felt like it was pretend and that when you can work with other people and place somehow existing things or be part of the development of something else but not have to claim it as your own, somehow it was a more, it was a broader spectrum of what was going on, it felt, just felt more real.

PON: And you developed a practice that uses or provides support structures where other artists work, how would you define these structures other than using the word support for that material that's within the space?

GW: Well sometimes, I think most specifically with the first support structure for 'I am a Curator' at the Chisenhale Gallery, I felt that that was very much a sort of programming tool, that it was a teaching tool, it was very didactic from the start and that we were setting it up to allow a set of possibilities to happen within a space and in some ways I felt more comfortable with that one as being this as a didactic tool because of the situation in which it was going into which was not that the artists creativity isn't at stake at all within that project, what's at stake is the experience of the daily curators who would be potentially just members of the public who have no art experience at all so what's at stake is the quality of their experience and how that experience affects them in a kind of educational way. Therefore I thought that was the time when we could make a structure which is meant to teach you and prompt you in a much stronger way than I might normally make but within that I still think it has an open and abstract enough set of possibilities to be able to use outside of that if you're aware of it.

PON: This is very different to the 'Support Structure' at the Economist Building, which was kind of supporting itself somehow or responding directly to the architecture predominantly.

GW: That was one of the most difficult situations and I think it might have just been in the end that we just felt a bit insignificant and a little bit redundant at The Economist. It was kind of like the reason I

wanted to do a project there was because I thought there wasn't a need for any art there, so it was an odd reason in the first place full of contradiction. I thought that the art of the project would arise out of making that clear somehow, that art's job was to not put any art there, but instead was to put structures in which would just look functional and be very mundanely functional. I do find that project had a lot of problems at The Economist, and I still think it's quite hard to sum up and to make sense of but partly it was just because we couldn't identify clearly a set of briefs from people within that environment so we were left dealing with abstract notions and understanding it as a public space.

PON: What are the particular curatorial models of key exhibitions or historical precedents or precursors that have been an influence on your thinking about the relationship between curating and your work as an artist or curator?

GW: There's one, I can't tell you the date or even where it was, I could find it out for you, but there's a photograph in a Sol LeWitt catalogue that I'd seen when I was a student and was fascinated by and kind of then came back onto it a few years later and I think it's an exhibition by Daniel Buren where he had mirrored doorways on walls opposite doorways, he did the shape of the doorway in stripes on the wall opposite, through about three rooms, and then Sol LeWitt came in and he asked Buren if he could leave the works there and then he did a series of wall drawings which were from corners and corners of designated meeting points which ended up sitting on the top of the Buren works and I can actually remember it being a jolt of seeing this and reading what was happening in the image. The idea that the two artists agreed to do this thing, to allow the work to co-exist, and I think that was really there in the back of my mind early on, that I thought this was fantastic, that there was something else created by those two things coming together.

PON: When you produced the *Curating in the 21st Century* book, it was obviously at a moment where, it was obviously at the right moment but at a moment where it was obvious that there was the role of the curator and the visibility of the curator within contemporary art exhibitions and its distribution was at a greater level than ever before. So

Curating in the 21st Century was certainly a response to that kind of shift, which probably happened in the late 1980s onwards. From the late '80s what would you see as being the key developments during that period?

GW: For me the one key element was the furthering of the strategy of the artist using notions and approaches of curating within their practice. In a kind of really vulgar way, it seems now, what first affected me was Damien Hirst curating shows. I never saw any of his curated shows until his later Serpentine show and there are no ideas that he would express that influenced me particularly but it was just the actual idea of the artist taking that under their belt. I was a student in the early 90s and this was my first understanding of someone who is a curator. I don't think I had thought about it before that. From that point I didn't go away and study curating or delve into its history at all, I just went and curated some exhibitions and in the process of doing that I learned huge amounts from artists and began to mine the possibilities of what a curator can do and why. Only then when I had curated a more complex exhibition like 'Low Maintenance & High Precision' in Deptford in 1997 and started to plan such an ambitious exhibition as 'In The Midst of Things', which then happened in Bournville in '99, did I start to reflect back and examine other conditions and histories and possibilities. I felt like I was finding myself in some kind of inherent trajectory of the curator and could then understand other positions very clearly. This led me to meet other curators to learn from and collaborate with and also then led to the *Curating in the 21st Century* book, which was developed alongside other very sharp cultural producers at Wolverhampton University. The key developments for me are the artist as curator, the artist-curator, the curator as collaborator, the curator as antagonist, the performative curator, the neo-curator (who works directly with the people rather than artists!), the artist as host or support structure and the idea of the curator as a producer of art or as cultural producer.

END OF TAPE

BRIAN WALLIS

(Introduced By Andrea Fraser)*

New York, 04-04-05

*Following my interview with Andrea Fraser earlier on the same day of this interview, Fraser requested that she introduce Wallis' interview. Wallis and I listened to this introduction/ recording prior to his interview, which continued on from where Fraser finished her introduction as indicated herein.

ANDREA FRASER: This' ll be an introduction to your interview with Brian that' s coming up. 'Damaged Goods' , was curated by Brian Wallis, and I guess it' s only like the third show that I was ever in, it' s the first museum show I was ever in. I was twenty. And I met Brian, at that time he was an editor of the journal called *Wedge* together with Phil Mariani, which was a great journal. And I think he was a friend of Louise Lawler' s, and when I wrote about Louise Lawler, that opened a lot of doors for me, because a lot of people liked her work, and immediately liked me as well for writing about her work. But 'Damaged Goods' I think, it' s an exhibition I often refer to as being really quite important in the history of, well reflexive curating, or it was one of the first sort of, it' s that, it' s thematic. Well Brian will tell you more about it - my understanding of the thematics of the show was that it was aimed at this particular mid eighties juncture between on the one hand you had commodity art, or what was emerging as commodity art - people like Haim Steinbach, Jeff Koons, who were in the show. And then you had art that was sort of post-pop, neo-conceptual, critical or like…

PON: Like General Idea?

AF: Well they would have been good in the show actually. They weren' t in the show. Like the installation in the show was designed by Judith Barry, but was also doing a lot of work about, like more in video, about shopping, about consumption. Ken Lume was in the show, with the furniture arrangement and with his sort of bossy photographs of corporates of people with logos. So it was a time when artists, before sort of so-called commodity art, got defined as a real, simply a market phenomenon, you know, with Jeff Koons and so forth, where I think he was trying to, you know, pull out the critical dimension of those practices. In terms of a critique of the commodity, a critique of consumption, but also a critique of display, and display mechanisms, and that' s where it linked up to institutional critique, and the link between commodity display in popular culture and museum display. So Alan

McCullum was also in the show, with his perfect vehicles, and Louise Lawler, and then I was invited. And one component of his concept was to invite artists to take over various roles and functions normally executed by people who worked in the museum, so for me to do a tour that he actually just invited me on the basis of the art, and the artists' book I had done and the posters that I had done, and then I proposed to do a tour, and that's what we worked out. And I think he was working with Louise Lawler at the time who was actually a photo editor on *Re-thinking Representation*, which he edited, which is this seminal book of the period, and Louise was the photo editor, so we had that kind of collaborative relationship with Louise at the time. I don't remember what she actually ended up doing. I'm not sure if she actually designed anything for the show. So in the end that proposal didn't really work out that well, except maybe with me and Judith Barry. But it was still one of the first I think instances of that, and that's the kind of curatorial idea that came back. I was in a show at Lace, in Los Angeles, a couple of years later that had a similar festival. In the nineties there were a number of curators like Jerôme Sans who were trying to do shows like that. So I think it was an important exhibition.

PON: And I mean you mentioned Louise Lawler had an impact on your practice?

AF: There were two artists who became very important to me in the mid eighties, whose work I wrote about also - Louise Lawler, whose work I wrote about in '85, and Alan McCullum, whose work I wrote about a couple of times - '86, '87. And then later I collaborated with both of them. Louise and I did a video together that was shot in museums, where she was the sort of art director and set up the shots, and I performed and wrote a script. And then I collaborated with Alan McCullum on 'May I Help You?' in the early nineties. And my connection to those artists I think is interesting partly because at the time, I was unusually young when I started working. I wrote about Louise when I was nineteen, I

was in that show when I was twenty. And they, even though they were considered part of the eighties generation, they were actually older than most of their peers, and had started working in the seventies, and had fairly strong connections to the previous generation of conceptualists and minimalists that a lot of their peers didn't have, peers in the Metro Pictures group and stuff. So it was this kind of interesting linkage of two slightly generationally displaced people. But they both had an enormous impact on my work.

PON: And prior to the eighties were there other historical models or paradigms, precedents or precursors that you were looking at? I mean you mentioned Seth Siegelaub earlier and people of the late sixties, early seventies.

AF: Well I only became really versed in the sort of mainstream of conceptualism later on, in the nineties, oddly. I mean people that I knew in the eighties, my friends, like Gregg Bordowitz and Mark Dion, studied with Joseph Kosuth, and I had contact with Joseph Kosuth because Gregg Bordowitz was my boyfriend at the time and was Joseph's assistant, so I was living in Joseph's loft practically. I had this funny connection, but my own education focused much more on, you know it was the Benjamin Buchloh canon, right, so the people that I was really interested in, in the mid eighties when I started working, were people like Hans Haacke, who I met in '89 when he invited me to teach at Cooper Union, where he taught at that point, and then he was extremely supportive of me ever since then, he's been great. And Hans is probably the biggest influence really. You know I mean my work simply could not exist without his work and it is an extraordinary number of his innovations, I mean not only in terms of sort of thematics, not only in terms of examination of art institutions and art and kind of political influence and issues of autonomy, but also in terms of a kind of systematic research-based practice through use of sociological methods, and those are the things that he started in the late sixties and early seventies with the survey pieces,

with the social systems work. So he was extremely important. And Michael Asher I came to know a little bit later, but I studied Michael Asher's Nova Scotia book and I guess I came to Buren at about the same time, but it was more through Michael Asher's practice and then Daniel Buren's writing. And in terms of thinking about all the sort of services work that I did in the nineties, kind of to a large extent started with the reading of Michael Asher, Michael Asher's work, but also thinking about the conditions of production, thinking of what the object of artistic practice as the conditions of artistic production, the conditions of artistic production are, that's what you work on fundamentally, and that's what those artists worked on, and that's what was so innovative. And Michael Asher's policy in that he had this structure that he refused to work with galleries, and the sort of rigorous site-specificity of the model that he maintained in a way that Buren didn't. So he was extremely important. And then the other people who were very important, and my work is really at this juncture of those conceptual traditions and then feminist film and performance, so Yvonne Rainer was extremely important to me and I also studied with her. And my approach to performance is deeply influenced by her films, where she uses a lot of quoted material in her films of the eighties, and then also Martha Rosler and Mary Kelly. I wrote about Mary Kelly's work in '86, about the first 'Post-Partum' documents. So thinking about sort of taking this kind of conjunction of critical practices, sort of critical site-specificity of institutional critique and post-studio practice and the investigation of subject production and positioning that came out of feminist practice, along with the performance. I mean before anyone was talking about you know performativity, I mean now it's everywhere, but in the eighties performance, you had body art, and you had feminist performance traditions you know, which were also realised increasingly in the eighties in film practices and you know that there was this kind of meeting of those two traditions. So that's really where it came out.

PON: Is there a very close interdependent relationship between your work as a writer, as a critic, and your work as an artist?

AF: Absolutely. I mean now I, for a long time almost all of my work as an artist was research-based, involved some kind of textual production. Recently I've done a few pieces that have no text. Basically three, there are three or four works like that now, but out of fifty. It came out when I first started doing gallery talks I thought of them as art criticism in action. I mean I wrote about, I started writing art criticism in '85 and I did a gallery talk in '86, and partly it was an answer to the problem of well how do you get sort of speech and critique into a gallery without making people sort of stand up and read text on a wall, you know. And performance was an answer to that. The way that I write almost all of my texts, I've written very few essays that are really just essays, I mean in the sense that I've written very few things that are not site-specific, that are not very kind of specifically structured in a way that at least intends to be reflexive, or involve a kind of first person element, you know. So I do think of all of my texts as sort of performative, and as attempting, and some of them I think of as performances, as this text called 'An Artist's Statement', 'A Speech on Documenta', and so on and so forth.

Main interview with Brian Wallis: (After listening to Fraser's intro)

PON: Maybe we could start with something about your first curatorial project.

BRIAN WALLIS: Well I think it's important to say that during the period that I have been involved in there's been a great permeability between these roles of writer, curator, artist, museum administrator, and all of those things. So I came out of art history, a sort of traditional art history graduate training, I got a job at the Guggenheim Museum as an assistant for one year,

and then I worked at the Museum of Modern Art as an assistant for two years, and then I got a job at the New Museum. So I had this sort of low-level training, working in museums, being around art and so forth. And also during the time I was at the Modern, I think it was when they were doing the big Picasso show of 1979/80, and a lot of the people who were hired to work on that installation were artists, I think Alan McCullum and Tom Lawson and a bunch of people it seemed like, and so they were working as art handlers, installation crew, and I was on the staff, and they were the ones that I ended up hanging out with. And one thing that was impressive to me was that Tom Lawson was publishing his own magazine, which was *Real Life*, and that was, sort of gave me permission to say well no if he can do it I can do it, and with Phil Mariani I started publishing a magazine called *Wedge*, which was sort of a critical exhibition in print of key artists working at the time who I thought of as political artists, which was not necessarily that they were dealing with politics overtly but that they were dealing with the politics of the institution and the politics of art making practices. So Martha Rosler and Hans Haacke and a lot of the younger post-modern artists were important to me for that reason as opposed to other reasons. So I was really interested for example in what Louise Lawler and Sherrie Levine were doing in making these kind of ephemeral objects, match books and posters and little things like that. And that was just one example of what many people were doing, that kind of ephemeral work across a wide spectrum of styles and practices at that time. So that was always something that was very interesting to me. And I guess even though I was sort of trained to be a traditional curator I was always interested in the fringes of that practice and pushing the thought processes and bringing as many elements into play in developing an exhibition as possible, and to think of the totality itself as a bearer of meaning, not just a sort of platform for the individual works or individual artists. And you know, surprising as it seems that was a fairly unusual idea back then. And I think all of the people who were involved in that idea would tell you how they sort of gravitated towards one

another.

PON: This would have been the mid eighties?

BW: Early eighties. Very early eighties I think. I started working at the New Museum I think in 1982, 81, something like that, and it was, most of what was going on in the discussion about changing art practice and the role of the museum and that was going on in print. Critical writing - I was particularly influenced by Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp and those writers around *October*, although a lot of their more interesting things appeared in places other than *October*, but they were two of the key figures. And it was a unique American cell of activity, because I remember going to Europe a couple of times in the early eighties and it was a whole different thing going on, I would say both in England and on the Continent, in France and Germany, other completely different attitudes towards the exhibition although with some crossovers. And when I was at the New Museum I know there was a lot of interesting stuff going on at the ICA in London and so forth, so you know we began to develop those kinds of alliances. In any event, I think the first large-scale exhibition that I did was 'Damaged Goods', which I did at the New Museum. I was already at that point planning this Hans Haacke retrospective, and I think what happened was the New Museum ran out of money at one point and they were going to close for the summer. And I said well how much money do you have? I can do an exhibition that wouldn't cost that much. And they said you've got ten thousand dollars and not a penny more, so... And I came up with this idea that was you know already fairly obvious at that point of bringing together this, yeah post-modern is what they would have called themselves then, these post-modern artists who were interested in exchange and the commodity, and I think the ICA in Boston did a show that was very similar at about the same time.

PON: This would have been Louise Lawler, Haim Steinbach, Andrea Fraser?

BW: Right. Well Andrea was the youngest person, but it was sort of more Jeff Koons, Haim Steinbach, they were kind of the big figures at that point. And then I think I was trying to say you know those guys are not doing something that is different, they're doing something that's similar to the Louise Lawler, Barbara Bloom, Gretchen Bender, Alan McCullum group. And in terms of curatorial practice, I think a couple of interesting things that we did in that exhibition were bringing in an artist, Judith Barry, to design the installation, and having Andrea Fraser do as her contribution the walk through, the tour of the exhibition. But again those were strategies that I think had already been introduced into the vocabulary in some ways by artists like Louise Lawler in Group Material, or in things like that, who were very much a part of the dialogue at that time. So part of it was expediency - we couldn't pay to have a lot of things made - and part of it was just trying to get things done, like the design of the installation, without paying an exhibition designer, but getting an artist to do it, and Judith was enthusiastic to do it, without remuneration, so that worked well. But a couple of things came out of that. One was the idea that an exhibition is a totality that needs to be designed and conceptualised in a way that not only provides a backdrop for the art but really communicates a total sensorial experience for the viewer that is not subliminal but overt, and that coming into the exhibition you realise that there is a logic, and a design and an arrangement that you're also supposed to respond to as well as the individual pictures on the wall. There's a context in that the context is a separate thing as the meaning. And then that there is a critical voice that is circulating within the exhibition, it's not just the critic comes in from the outside and comments as a supplement to the exhibition. So that's why it was important to animate that concept through the figure of an artist, who actually would provide a voice for that critical discourse within. And Andrea was the perfect person for that, and it was great, yeah it was funny and...

PON: There's a whole history, particularly in the avant-garde of the twenties, thirties and forties, of involving artists within exhibition design. I'm thinking of people like Frederick Kiesler or Duchamp, were you aware and informed by these projects.

BW: Oh absolutely, definitely, definitely. I mean it's sort of surprising that, I think you hear less about Duchamp these days. Maybe more, maybe it's just so overt, but at that point it was still you know, he was still somewhat of an underground reputation, and certainly in terms of non-physical objects his work was far less considered. But you know that aspect of his work, the non-tangible aspect and the design aspect of his work was very important to me. I was also, I was very involved in and interested in the whole history of exhibition design. The Russian avant-garde was a subject that was being explored mostly by architectural historians at that point, oddly enough, and some visual historians, and there was still an idea I guess that it was difficult to get information from the Soviet Union. But I remember being acquainted with a Soviet art historian at that time, who did a show at the new Museum of Contemporary Soviet Art, and I remember pumping her for information about Russian sources for material on avant-garde exhibition design. And then Benjamin Buchloh was doing some work on El Lissitzky at the time and the whole discourse around photo-montage and the idea of this fragmentation and regrouping of materials in montage was also a very important discussion, and you know obviously I guess in retrospect it fits into the sole definition of post-modernism, but at that point it was just like a strand of a lost history that we were trying to reconstitute. And Christopher Phillips, who was just in here, and I were involved in this show in Boston at the ICA on the history of photo-montage, that I think was very important. And there was a lot of discussion around that show about the exhibition design - I can't remember who exactly finally carried it out but just to make the point that curators at that point really regarded, or some curators regarded exhibition design as a really important carrier of the critical concepts.

PON: In *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at MOMA*, Mary Anne Staniszewski highlights what she calls an 'amnesia' towards the evolution of exhibitionary display practices of the past. Do you think that this 'amnesia' or oppressed history has also clearly impacted upon how we perceive modern or contemporary art curation?

BW: Oh absolutely, yeah, oh I fully agree with that. As it pertains to the Museum of Modern Art, or to museums of modern art in general, I think there's a certain necessity to suppress that history, and I think in the course of that history things like Duchamp's installations were a deliberate attempt to subvert, or circumvent or challenge that sort of pristine space. And it's odd because, or I always thought it was odd, that within the frame of the picture there was a lot of attention to breaking down boundaries or developing elaborate fantasies, but for the most part that didn't extend to the space in which you were standing. So the Keisler installation was something that I was always very interested in and I know they recreated that at the Whitney and that was a great moment for me. The Salvador Dali installation at the '39 World's Fair was very important to me, all of the Duchamp's installations. I mean I had a dream at one point of recreating Duchamp's studio, which I always thought was probably an extraordinary spatial manifestation and I remember a lot of discussions from those days about Schwitter's Marzbau and even Mondrian's studio as the sort of prototypical installations by artists that came out of this kind of turn of the century gesamtkunstwerk idea, but sort of gradually pushed out into the exhibition space as a whole. At one point I began writing an article on Duchamp as curator, which you know was fascinating to me, I mean it was such an extensive part of his practice. You know he did an early Brancusi exhibition that I researched and I was thrilled by the idea of him just leaning pictures up against the wall and developing different kinds of pedestals and so forth.

PON: Did you ever publish that?

BW: No. But you know I was trying to trace this development from his domestic space to these increasingly grandiose and assaultive installations, and you know at that point, I mean this is in the wake of Kynaston McShine's exhibition where all of the elements of Duchamp's work were sort of taken out of their context and so the little spoon that he used to open the latch of the door was considered as a work just in that discreet space, but not in the larger symphony of things that he might have done in the studio.

PON: So was it a critique, or your way of critiquing Kynaston McShine's Duchamp show?

BW: Oh absolutely, yeah. I mean you know it was great for him to have done it but it was typical of this practice that you're talking about that Mary Anne talked about in the Modern's history of taking something that is potentially subversive and removing it, stripping it of its environmental context, so you just look at the object itself and you never… Another great one that I think was reproduced in the 'Damaged Goods' catalogue was the installation of Surrealist objects at the gallery in Paris, where they had these display cases with all these objects and things hanging from the ceiling and so forth, and to me that was thrilling to see these things brought back into concert with one another instead of like at MOMA at that time you had the little fur-covered teacup here and everything was kind of divorced from not only its original context but from real life itself. And it was physically painful to see that, and to work at MOMA and see that, it was ludicrous, and one of the things that…And I was trying to think in a sort of undeveloped way about how to bring that into this 'Damaged Goods' exhibition, and a couple of things that I wanted to do that were rejected were I wanted to publish in the catalogue the budget for the exhibition, and what everything cost and who got paid not only in terms of transparency but just like what are the nuts and bolts of this kind of thing. And the other thing I wanted to do, since it dealt with desire in the commodity, was to put the market price of each work on the wall

label. Nobody seemed to like that idea so much - I don't know why, I mean it made perfect sense, but…

PON: A key term that Seth Siegelaub used in the late sixties, early seventies, was 'demystification' in order to describe the changing role of the curator within contemporary art exhibitions at that time. Do you think this is still a valid term in relation to curating now?

BW: Yeah. Well, there are people who are always rushing to profit up, intentionally or not, and it sort of goes hand in hand with the mystification of the artist, and… I remember having a big argument with Robert Irwin, who was on our Artists Advisory Board, and his view, which I think is prevalent, was that the museum was there to provide a kind of pedestal for the work, the work of the artist. And I was saying that's ridiculous, so we're just sort of functionaries to you know prop up this thing to add symbolic or mythological power to the work that is created. And he said, 'Uh huh'. And I said that is completely the opposite of what I believe in. I believe in, you know if that's what you want to do then you should sort of show the people, you know have them standing there holding it up or something like that rather than just strip away all of that labour and all of that expense and all of that process, to create the illusion that it comes from nowhere and it has nothing round it. That was my big axe that I was grinding at that point. But Siegelaub was definitely an important influence, and a kind of quasi-mythical figure himself, he sort of dropped out at that point in '73.

Aside from all the art historical references that were important I saw Siegelaub and Guy Debord as the twin figures that I was sort of operating in-between, because a lot of the discussion too in this critical discussion about context involved what is that real life context, and a large part of it was the media, the mass media, photography was an important critical language that was just beginning to be investigated at that point, and so you could

see how elements of this rather rarified museological discussion also landed into discussions about post-modernism and questions about authorship and appropriation and so forth.

PON: And do you think there's been dominant forms of curatorial practice that have developed since the eighties, the period that you started working in?

BW: Not really. I mean I would be hard pressed to know that history and be curious with your finding out or what connection you're making, but I mean there was certainly an ongoing stream of alternative practice, some of which took place in the dying days of alternative spaces, and that had a pronounced influence I think on the mainstream practices, but you know the mainstream just kept getting stronger and bigger. And the fear was kind of borne out that whatever you did just got sucked into this machinery of the mainstream. And Tom Lawson always had this idea of being a mole within the system, and you know his argument that I thought was interesting and I always took to heart was that you have to work within the system to dismantle it, and so I always tried to position myself within those structures that I thought were viable for dismantling - not only dismantling but also building something productive within. But those are kind of rapidly closing opportunities when you encounter them, and I think the thing that happened in mainstream institutions, and the Modern was always the prototype, was that those little wedge-like opportunities that would open up would close down very rapidly, whereas when I was at the New Museum I was there for six or seven years and I think the group of curators that were there were able to sustain this interesting dialogue for quite a long time.

PON: There are maybe three things that have been dominant. Firstly, the group exhibition as the default button within contemporary curating, and monographic shows are not seen as the serious work of the curator. I think the second thing is perhaps the rise and increase of the biennial, the international biennial,

which I think more recently has perhaps been replaced by the art fair, and then the art fair usurping or co-opting or using certain strategies that are inherent to the biennial but using them, presenting artists' projects, launching publications, discussions, holding discussions and open forums etc., but within an art fair context. I think to me they would be two of the things that shifted. And the third thing is an interdependent relationship between large public art institutions and the independence, so-called, of other curators, so curators are employed by large institutions. So ultimately the administrative aspects of an institutional curator's job ultimately in his view necessitates the institution itself, then necessitates a certain kind of employee that they can take on for a short period in order to do key projects. Would you agree with that?

BW: Well I think most of the things that you mentioned are more typical of European institutions than American, I think, and particularly in this period - and I'm probably talking about more the early part of the period than the later part, so sort of 1980 to '95 rather than '85 to 2000, where there was, say from the early nineties on, a noticeable shift to greater validity and attention to these biennials and art fairs. But in the American context I think, particularly in the early eighties, this dynamic between alternative spaces and established museums was very pronounced, and so a lot of the more interesting curatorial projects emanated from alternative spaces and infiltrated larger institutions, at brief moments, flare-ups of sorts. And I think that's probably not something that's so prevalent in Europe, at least to the degree that the alternative spaces really are a recognised, self-sustaining but formally subsidised entity, with a strong backing, and there are a lot of reasons for the downfall of that but from a curatorial point of view I think that was the training ground for a lot of artists and curators.

PON: You mentioned your interest in people like Guy Debord and Seth Siegelaub and also the Russian avant-garde. How did your

interest in those figures or in those moments manifest itself in the exhibitions that you curated?

BW: Well, obviously somebody like Seth Siegelaub, who's investigating throughout his practice the circulation of art objects and the value attached to them, and challenging that economic system of exchange and trying to replace it with a more open, accessible system of ideas, that was the basis for all of the work that took place in the early eighties. And you know whatever anybody talks about in retrospect about post-modernism, it was really based on those conceptual ideas, and so various people tried to either recreate or sustain those ideas in different forms but even somebody like Jeff Koons was talking about conceptual challenges to the art system in the early eighties. So that kind of just underlay everything as a prerequisite, and I would not have imagined at that point that there was a logical explanation for one style or art movement succeeding another. I mean, and I still, I guess I tend to think of that as a simplification by art historians. But in that case there were very direct references to conceptual art and aspects of minimalism that people in the American context in the early 1980s were referring to constantly. And the other side, the Debord side, was really about a response to the media, and to, on the one hand, a lot of discussions at that point about media imperialism and the spread of American-dominated film and television internationally but also its replication of stereotypes and its sort of homogenisation of ideas, that was key to something like Barbara Kruger's work for example or even in a very different way, Richard Prince. So you know those. Debord was, I think in '83, '84, pretty much still an unknown quantity, but then I think there was a show at the ICA in Boston and there was one at the ICA in London at about the same time and it sort of became the thing to talk about which was Situationism, but in the early eighties it was again this sort of underground information, it was like people scrambling to try and get a hold of this hard to locate material and so on.

PON: How would you describe your curatorial practice as distinct from that of others?

BW: Well what I've tried to do is to give the work that I have done a very solid, traditional grounding to emphasise the cascading levels of political implications, to raise the compelling critical issues, both aesthetic and political, that stem from that, and to make the exhibitions very visually seductive - not just the works on the wall but the whole environment and ambience of the space that I try to work in a way that activates all of those elements. So I recall in particular when I did the Hans Haacke exhibition, there were some complaints at the time to involve a very traditional art historian like Leo Steinberg to do a very traditional format, which was a mock catalogue raisonnée, and to present the work in the sort of very austere, almost solemn context, but that was all sort of planned and orchestrated to both accentuate and to mask the subversion of his work, or the subversive potential of his work. And so in the exhibition for example we had these twenty-foot columns in the space that we had decorated with faux marble, and it looked like St Peter's or something. And then there was this beautiful portrait that he made of Margaret Thatcher and so forth. But then on the other wall was this sort of heinous examination of the slum lords of the Lower East Side, so you know for people who were attentive to it I think there was a real tension that was created between the opulence and the seriousness of the setting, and the sort of grittiness and humour and kind of loathsome statistical accounting of this work about the Lower East Side. So anyway it's those kinds of juxtapositions and subtle contrasts that I think I tried to set up.

PON: Do you think that a curated art exhibition can be a work of art in itself? It's a deliberately open-ended question.

BW: Ah, yeah well I wouldn't put it that way! But I would say that I think that the distinctions between artists and curators

have dissolved in part because I think questioning this idea of the work of art has been germane to both of them and there's been much more emphasis on the idea of process and critical investigations rather than creating something that stands alone and is to be contemplated as one would have looked at the traditional work of art. I think it's more about entering into something and developing an exploration of the ideas, with the participation of companionship of the artists or curator, who then you know proposes a certain thesis and walks you through the steps of the argument or the proposal.

PON: Do you think a curator is ultimately like an author of a particular spatial narrative?

BW: Yes.

PON: What kind of author would you be?

BW: What kind of author? It's the generic type I think would be the critical guide, the Dante-esque guide to the delights and perils of visual culture. Well you know I think Andrea's example is apt because she has very skillfully figured out how to embody all these different roles which are sort of tour guide for tourists, disconnected expert or authority, seductress or temptress, entertainer. You know, curators and artists are all these things but I think the challenge is not to be too consumed by any one of them, and to use those tools to try to challenge people intellectually and visually to think about the world and our relation to the world in a different way. I mean it really comes back to what is the goal, what are the purposes, and for me, and I think for a lot of people of my generation, artists and curators and writers, it was about trying to create a way of reading the world, and the writings of Roland Barthes were very influential in that regard to like see the world as this text that can be read in different ways. And an exhibition was the sort of primer in how to read these particular elements in a way. So

instead of saying this is the history of Surrealism, it was like here's a proposition - take this handful of works and let's look at the connections between them in a particular provisional way, and you know with the understanding that you could come up with a completely different set of issues and examples the next day - that would be fine too.

PON: I mean what is your curatorial post here, role here at the ICP?

BW: Well again it's one of those situations where you know there seems to be a little bit of an opening. One of the challenges was that it always seemed really strange to have these medium-specific departments or museums, like that didn't make any sense at all and really goes back to the most rigid and retrograde ideas under the Museum of Modern Art. But of those mediums, photography seemed the most pliable in terms of opening up questions of truth and veracity in contemporary art and visual practice. But also photography was inherently interesting and it turned out it was, even though I hadn't really thought of it this way, it was part of a lot of the discussions that I was involved in around post-modernism and the work of Richard Prince and Sherrie Levine and Louise and Barbara Kruger and people like that. All the people that I had written about were in one way or another dealing with discourses in the photograph if not in the photography world. And so that was a big thing to try to break down here, was the distinction between the photography world and the art world idea of photography, but fortunately that had already been happening in the work of a lot of writers, like Abigail Solomon-Godeau and people like that, who had set up and challenged those distinctions, and the whole art world itself had sort of discovered photography and figured out that was a quick way to make some money. So when I came here in 2000 it was really about negotiating that kind of Middle East peace treaty between the art world and the photography world and to try and make something productive of that. And so a long way around to your question, I

tried to do two or three things when I was here. One was to investigate this core principle here at Cornell campus, which was the concerned photographer, what really did that mean? That interested me because for him the concerned photographer was a politically engaged artist who was interested in changing or questioning the world around him or her through the use of visual means, that exactly was what I was doing, although one wouldn't recognise what I was interested in was shown at ICP. So in part my strategy was to try and show, and to update that definition and show how it really connects with a very interesting and broad range of artistic practice in the late twentieth century. And so one of the first shows we had was Martha Rosler and we had a great installation by Carrie Mae Weems, so trying to deal with artists who were answering those questions or asking those questions on both sides of the divide, as photographers and as artists, and also dealing with the spatial explorations that those questions raised. And then more concretely, I always saw part of exhibition design as being an element of the mix here so one of the first things we did was to hire Julie Ault and later Martin Beck to work as a team to design the exhibitions here, and they were full partners in developing the concepts of the ideas and the arrangement of the works and so forth, so that had a very strong influence on the way shows were physically presented here. And then to try to assemble a strong staff here of people who were involved in like-minded investigations, so we hired Christopher Phillips and Carol Squires and we brought in a lot of guest curators, many of whom had been involved in historical exhibitions but from very contemporary critical positions and trying to raise some of those historical questions, and also historical precedents for the type of visual experiences that we are trying to create here. So those are some of the things that I've been trying to do, and to travel exhibitions, to create books that accompany them. The show that I think the best exemplifies my desires for the curatorial programme and my own practice is the one that I worked on with Coco Fusco, called 'Only Skin Deep', and it brought together a lot of the elements that I've been working on, just

been talking about, in that it combined historical images with contemporary images around a strong and largely unresolved critical investigation, in this case how the representation of race in American photography has fortified the idea, the fictional idea of race in American culture, and whether an understanding of that or reading of those images against the grain can help to challenge those embedded ideas about race and racial politics. And for some crazy reason there was a lot of money behind this, and I think we were able to marshal that towards all of the goals that one would want to try to accomplish. And there's a fabulous anthology published in connection with it, it was a big, full-blown exhibition with a lot of great loaned objects, fabulous things to look at. A substantial component of it was contemporary artists who were really looking and thinking about these questions - it wasn't just a pulled together list of famous people. There was a great website that was beautifully designed and really impressive to look through. There was a great symposium and it was sort of like working on all cylinders to try to stimulate various kinds of critical discourses in those different ways and in those different arenas. Hans Haacke always used to say look the exhibition is just a pretext to get people going - they wouldn't write about me in the newspaper if there wasn't an exhibition to pin it on but if there's an exhibition they can come around and interview me and I can talk about what I feel about corporate sponsorship or whatever it was at that moment and then the word is out, and then people are talking about it, and it becomes part of the critical vocabulary and so forth. So that's part of it, is just creating an opportunity or an engine to drive the critical discussion.

PON: With the Larry Clark show downstairs - do you think this is the right time for a historical show of an artist like Larry Clark, whose work has been made visible over the last few years?

BW: Obviously I do.

PON: Do you think it's the right time now as opposed to maybe five years ago, ten years ago?

BW: Well the thing is, I would dispute your point that you made earlier about monographic shows being less important. I mean you know that may be valid, that they've assumed a lesser importance, but I think they're really, they can be very effective in that it's a...

PON: I meant specifically within a narrow field of curatorial discourse. There's an assumption that the default button is the group exhibition, so when you open up any book about curating the discursive space is ultimately about the group exhibition and the role of the contemporary curator within that, and the idea of him or her as being the producer of a spatial narrative through arrangements and juxtapositions of artworks etc. While I would say that monographic exhibitions, although they're still very prevalent, particularly within large public modern art institutions, I would say that the relationship between the curatorial premise and the artworks on display is less opaque, less visible within the monographic show.

BW: Well there are a couple of things. One is I think a lot of times they are more difficult and challenging to do. I mean they look easy because there's this seeming coherence, but it's easier to get an artist to contribute to but not participate in a group show. But a one person show, that artist is definitely in there with you and it's a collaboration and you're wrestling the whole way, so it's very difficult to override or to make more overt the critical manoeuvres. But at the same time just the fact of a particular artist at a particular moment, as you suggest, is significant in itself, and I mean this was certainly true in the case of Hans Haacke, to take an example that I've worked on. That was something that couldn't have happened earlier, it would have happened in a very different way later, but that was the earliest possible moment to do that show in the United States. He was sort

of blacklisted after this show at the Guggenheim was cancelled. The New Museum was regarded as the only place in the country that would touch that show because it was, you know everybody thought he was going to do some big exposé on the Board of Directors or something like that, and nobody wanted to touch it. Yet among critics his work was very much what people were talking about and wanted to investigate, the issue that he was raising at that point about corporate sponsorship was very germane, I mean it was the heyday of corporate sponsorship and it was being utilised in some garish ways. So it was important and useful to raise that at that time. And as I've suggested, him individually, or that work, was really the vehicle to open up this cornucopia of critical ideas, and there was the issue of corporate sponsorship, there was the issue of homelessness and the programmed decay of urban spaces. There were a whole bunch of key critical issues at the time that sort of galvanised around this show. The Larry Clark show was again a show that was very, very difficult to negotiate through the choppy waters of boardrooms and hesitant directors. This would not have been my ideal timing for the exhibition. I proposed it about ten years ago at the Whitney, where it would have really been ideal because a lot of the issues that the work addresses were somewhat more heated up at that point, or in a different way, particular issues about censorship and the body and representation of sexuality in the context of the fallout from Mapplethorpe and Serrano and the rise of younger more subjectively-oriented photographers like Nan Goldin and Jack Pearson and people like that. There was an appropriateness to Larry Clark. I'm sort of shocked seeing the exhibition now, that it looks very staid and formal and almost like a traditional photographer, but nevertheless, having lived through these many years of trying to calm people down about the work and say it's not that bad, I think it's important for people to get over that, which a lot of people seem to have done, and to see that there is really important work here, the guy's not a pervert, he's not a criminal, he's an important artist who has provided the bedrock of critical ideas for a lot of work that has come out subsequently,

and whose work still provides a reference point for those issues about censorship and suppression of certain ideas, particularly sexual images in American culture. I mean it's just staggering to see where we are. I mean it is backsliding from where we were ten years ago when these issues were heated up. Now there's more suppression but the debate is maybe less visible. It's sort of shocking what you can be arrested for or what you are not allowed to do, and a lot of those issues came up in relation to this Clark exhibition. I mean it had to be vetted by several teams of PR advisors and lawyers and so forth, and I think the fact of the matter is you'd be hard pressed to find legal statutes that would support showing this work because a lot of it seems to fall within the category of child pornography as it's loosely defined in our current laws, following the internet pornography law. So it is oddly, even though it seems rather tame in the galleries, a very risky thing. It was I think a bold move for our director to say yes we're going ahead with it even though it seems to be primarily illegal, and it's a strange thing where you've got something that is so forbidden and so out there and then seems so normal and logical when it's on the walls. At least that's my experience of it.

PON: Can we go back to some of your earlier exhibitions that used curating as a historical critique as well as a media critique such as your show with the Independent Group?

BW: For the issue of media critique, which I think gets lost in this discussion about institutional critique which sort of becomes a very esoteric art world discussion, but the issue of media criticism which was equally prevalent in the eighties. There were two exhibitions that I was interested in, but I worked on that, sort of addressed this directly, and they were both at alternative spaces, which sort of supports this point of alternative spaces providing an opportunity for more interesting curatorial investigations. One was this one of the Independent Group, called 'This Is Tomorrow Today', which was on the one hand an attempt to

look at the exhibition curatorial strategies of a couple of these teams that worked on the show 'This Is Tomorrow', but it was also about looking at the way the Independent Group had started out with these sort of seminar-like media discussion, and their response in post-war England to this flood of American media, like magazines and other sources, that seemed to have this overwhelming bounty of visual imagery. And so it was those two things side by side that I was very much interested in at that point, and I think a lot of people were involved in. And that exhibition also, Judith Barry also worked on that as an exhibition designer, and the installation again combined with these elements of traditionalism with an interest in contemporary ideas. So we did this very traditional thing of recreating these installations by Hamilton and Paolozzi, and their teams, but then the other historical artifacts and elements of the exhibition were installed in a way that was I think very much about a visualisation of contemporary critical issues, and the Hamilton collage was very much kind of the Rosetta Stone for that critical discussion and for that exhibition and we actually borrowed the original piece. Anyway so that was one. And the other one was presented at Exit Art and it was about the battles over information between the underground and the mainstream, from the 1960s to the present, tracing this alternative current of information and imagery from the underground press through various movements of the seventies, ecology and so forth, to the zine movement of the early nineties and then to the internet. This was very much a part of the same thing, this is a sort of ongoing critique about how one receives and challenges information, and you know this is the language of the alternative press of the 1960s. All it was about was you know expressing a desire for complete freedom of speech, challenging received information and images, and replacing them with other more subjective interpretations or versions of that information. And so anyway it was just an attempt to trace that alternative history.

END OF TAPE

LAWRENCE WEINER

New York, 08-11-05

PAUL O'NEILL: So how do you see the role of the contemporary art curator having developed in the last fifteen to twenty years?

LAWRENCE WEINER: I have to go back a little further than fifteen or twenty years. Let's say at a certain time, because of when I entered the art world which was in the early sixties, there was a complete division between so called 'popular art', so called 'museum art', and so called 'contemporary art'. There became a need for curators who were interested in what was going on 'outside of the box', and very often there was nothing wrong with what was going on inside of the box, it wasn't a sense of corruption or even decadence, it was a sense that the work which was being presented within the box adapted to the box to such an extent that when it had to function in the contemporary world that was changing, it couldn't, and it required curators to come along who were willing to take the risk, there were Kunstvereins in those days in Germany, there were all of these spaces that didn't have to take the obligation of buying something, they just basically had to keep somebody alive, fee structure, honorarium structure, they could show it, if it worked in their situation fine, if it didn't, they move on to the next. So the curator then became somebody who was selling snake oil. They were selling a new cure. By the time that reached the mid seventies and art became the provinces of nationalist situations, the British Council, Goethe Institute, Alliance Française, etcetera, etcetera, and it became a political issue and almost like football teams. The curator then began to take on another role.

PON: In terms of the sixties, you were talking about people like Seth Siegelaub, Harald Szeemann...

LW: Yes, Siegelaub, Szeemann, Klaus Honoff. If you think in terms of people now who are in very staid positions, they built their structure on being able to legitimately and correctly, which meant understanding, show a certain body of work that did not have a precedent. At least in my own case, I know that for sure, and, in the majority of other cases, I felt that the artists were looking for curators who at least understood what they did. They didn't even have to agree with it; they just had to understand it so that, when it was presented, it wasn't misrepresented.

PON: And would you say that your early collaborations with Seth Siegelaub for example, would have impacted on your practice as an artist?

LW: No, no. Happily, none. I have shown with Seth since 1964.

PON: Starting with the *Propeller* paintings?

LW: With the *Propeller* paintings and things like that, and I worked on all of these publications with him, as did most of the other artists that were involved in it. This was - no it didn't impact on their praxis at all. The praxis was developing and the structure was so amorphous, and so loose and so taking on so many people, that there was never any imposition on your practice. And then I found the majority of commercial dealers that I dealt with are never impounded, and when they looked like they were going to impact on something, that was when you put your hand up and you explained, look, if I'm any good, if I'm good enough for you to be showing, then I'm good enough for you to be showing me rather than showing what the interpretation or what you think the public would like. Most often if I had done what they had said, we would have had money, but in the end, you were the only one responsible for it and you'd better take good care of it.

PON: Was your 'Statement of Intent', in 1968-69 part of a consideration for the role of the organiser, the curator, inherent within that work?

LW: Not really. There was more, much more the 'Statement of Intent' is the receiver, it's the person who chooses to use the art. That means accepting responsibility for it, so in fact that's the person who sees it and incorporates it into their life, the person who sees it and incorporates it into their exhibition, or who sees it and incorporates it into their collection. All are equal in that sense; because they're people whom in order to deal with it, have to interact with it. So it was not really about just curators at all. Curators are nice but they are the mediators, that's their job, and the best curators are mediators with insight, and, but they are mediators. The role of the curator as an artist or building a mise en scène would work if they were sure that all artists would follow their instructions, and happily most don't. Yeah.

PON: Do you think that an exhibition can be a work of art, if it's an exhibition designed, organised by and thematically orchestrated by a curator?

LW: I haven't seen it happen, but theoretically it could be like an orchestration, or if each of the players, each of the artists were engaged and such, theoretically it could work. But even in something as loose as 'Utopia Station' 2003, there it always doesn't quite work as a work of art; it works as a staging area for works of art. And it's not because works of art are inherent in themselves that idiosyncratic or that special. It's just that each individual set of thoughts requires a little different plinth. It requires whatever plinth it requires at the time. And that's almost impossible for a curator to determine beforehand.

PON: You were starting to talk about the 1970s and how you felt curating was changing.

LW: When curating became national and there became a point, you had win, place or show, and then you began to see artists being included and excluded for propaganda reasons, and for building a structure, a commercial structure reasons, which in fact takes away the fact of the dialogue of a group exhibition.

PON: What would your position have been, say, in relation to Harald Szeemann's 'Documenta 5' in '72 and Daniel Buren's critique of the idea of the exhibition as a work of art of the curator in his essay 'An Exhibition of an Exhibition?'

LW: I don't know, because Daniel's critique of it was as well that he wanted the work of art, he wanted the 'Documenta' to contain the critique of himself, his own critique and I guess Szeemann refused.But most of the artists, myself included, were the ones that they were looking for, for hanging up Daniel's posters, so we basically we did agree that if this was going to be a gesamptkunstwerk, there had to be somebody whose essential praxis was that of analysis. I personally prefer presentation to explanation, to analysis. I do think that the public finds itself needing the things that artists present, eventually. But in order to do that it has to be presented, not explained, or else they have a predetermined idea of how to use it. But the exclusion of Buren in 'When Attitudes Become Form' show, it wasn't the 'Documenta', it was the 'Attitude' Show. The exclusion in that show did not fit in with the Celardi catalogue essay which was expunged from the catalogue in its reprinting and completely

changed when it got to England. The show became completely cosmatised. Any European that was not famous at that time, and I mean even streetwise famous, was rejected, and anything that was British was put in, if you look at it. Not bad artists, that's the funny part, it was not a matter of taking good and putting in schlock, it was that anybody who was doing something, a photo on the street, that the Europeans missed, bosom disappeared and somebody else was there, or somebody else went in there. Whatever was fitting into the thing? Once that happened, curators basically lost all sense of dignity. So you'd almost say that the curation of the 'Attitude Show', when it reached London, was the fall of the curator as the conductor of an orchestra.

PON: Why do you say that?

LW: Because it all began to have other meanings than what had already assumed. The interesting thing with groups of artists is when they fall together; you have to take it for granted they fell together for a reason. Curating like the 'Wyndham Show', I'm talking about shows that people take as historical, are, how did that all fall into place, how did the first one, the 'Bradford Show', that Doug Heubler was a teacher up there, and set that up, what did Robert Barry, Carl Andre and I have to do with each other, other than we were all friends. We knew each other but there weren't very many other people that would show with you, showing what you showed. When it got to Wyndham, brought in other people and it was the same thing, but then it, that's an orchestration, that's a curator building up a structure, where each person is singing, and that conversation changes the world. It's not that the one artist changes the world.

PON: And do you think that it loses value or it gains value within that orchestration?

LW: Oh it gains value because art is judged by its use value. Use within the society, and even if that use is the use of an abject rejection, that's fine. I mean, you can push it and be anecdotal about it, and I got an award in New York that I wanted to get, I like getting awards, and I stood up and said I honestly must say, it was like five hundred other shaker breakers, kind of thing, I must honestly say I genuinely like getting an award, I'm very pleased, and it was given to me by Leo

Castelli, but I want to thank everybody in this audience and it was the establishment, for in the beginning hating what I did so much that there wasn't a person left in the world who hadn't heard about it, and it was into that conversation that you go into the jungles of Africa, where nobody has ever seen a movie, but they knew that Greta Garbo wanted to be alone! And that kind of a phenomenon is really how art places, there's somebody out there, yourself, myself, that has an idea of something. There's nothing they can find that connects, they're reading, they're looking, they're building up their idea of the world, then all of a sudden they hear about this woman who painted white canvases, and they hear about it, they never get to see it. They don't even know that there's art magazines, and they wouldn't be in the art magazines because that stuff is usually rejected at the beginning, but they hear about it and that gives them enough of an impetus to continue to think in those other terms. And that was not a joke when I said the thing about Greta Garbo.

PON: If you were to look at it chronologically and linearly as a trajectory between someone like Siegelaub and Hans Ulrich Obrist, who you mentioned in relation to 'Utopia Station', how do you think that the kind of the models of curation, which both of them used - used and used continuously, how do you think that may have changed?

LW: Oh, that's really a matter of personalities, I think, because Seth Siegelaub for example took on an aggressive situation, and Hans Ulrich essentially has a benevolent passive situation. He becomes enthusiastic about something, but then he lets the thing run itself. I don't think Seth could ever do that, I don't think he was supposed to. He was in charge of his own destiny, and his destiny was tied up with the change in what constituted a work of art. Hans Ulrich, his destiny is tied up with how art changes the destiny of the world. There is a difference. So there's no way, again, it's the simultaneity thing, there's no way to build a hierarchical thing. I worked with Hans Ulrich as you know, and I worked with Seth and quite a few people in between!

PON: Hans Ulrich has often been cited as being the nineties generation of curator, where Seth was kind of recognised as being the sixties generation, or even if you like, the birth of the independent curator, alongside people like Harald Szeemann, whereas Hans Ulrich would be kind of, followed the Kasper König trajectory as well.

LW: Yes, and Hans Ulrich, because of his association with ARC, had a certain kind of a respectability attached to it that Siegelaub living in a little apartment on Madison Avenue, did not have, because he had lost the gallery and all.

PON: I suppose the other question, or the other issue is probably one of scale as well, because Seth was living in New York and working with a relatively small number of artists, while Hans Ulrich works with many.

LW: But for some reason he went all over the world, and that was before faxes, even. That was when you waited until 4 o'clock in the morning to call Europe, because it was cheaper in New York, and it was 10 o'clock there. It was different times yet how in heavens name did an artist like Daniel Buren know what I was doing in New York, how did I know what Daniel was doing in Paris? How did everybody know everything? I honestly and truly must say I don't know how everybody knew, but everybody did.

PON: And do you think that's down to people travelling, or?

LW: It's travelling, but also through some shows that had been done, remember. There were shows that got lost, the show of Land Art, in the United States that brought Jan Dibbets here. They brought a few other people here to interact with other artists, that's how I met him. And there's that kind of a show. There was the 'Artists' Conference' in Halifax, which lost, has disappeared from history that brought Beuys over, Mario Merz, Ronnie Bladden taking the train up myself, this, that and the other, all of these people...that broke apart that whole other syndrome, but unless you take all of those things into account, there's no way to figure it out. I remember Gerhard Richter was staying in Nova Scotia. Just for a term, everybody was doing these other things that really built up a larger structure. Konrad Fisher in the sixties was bringing people from New York, by a wing and a prayer, and they entered into the Rhineland art world. That's all curating of a form, there's social curating, there's institutional curating, and then there's propaganda curating. So if we just leave the propaganda curating outside of everything, which is most of the major theme shows, you get this other thing that has spread communication in a very good way, so I see it as positive. I'm in all the time, and that's still why I'm in as many group shows as I am, I do feel

that in fact, when it's at all possible, that's when you do it, you get up and you sing with your colleagues, and it's not for them to tell you 'you should be singing with people your own age or singing with people that are older or younger'. It's not for them to tell you anything. It's for them to invite you and you accept or reject.

PON: What you seem to be talking about is a lost history - or a missing history?

LW: I think that must be true for absolutely everybody. Do we know the conversation at studios after the Second World War with Elsworth Kelly and Chuck Shiniver and these people wandering around? We don't know what went on, do we? I don't even remember all of the conversations from 1963 when I went to that show protesting the Algerian continuation it was a suggestion that a peace was finally settled, they were still killing people. We did this show by the prison, with Leon Golub, myself; I mean I don't know how I got there. I flew Icelandic Air to Gatwick, do you know where Gatwick is? That's in Scotland. Gatwick in Scotland, and that was the furthest I could go on my ticket. It was the cheapest ticket possible, and then made my way, somewhere or other, to Paris, to make a show.

PON: That must have taken a while?

LW: No, it didn't. We were standing in the airport and it was different times. A couple of stewardesses came over to the girl that I was with, myself and said 'what are you trying to do?' She said 'trying to find some way that's cheaper than the train to get to London'. Of course we wanted to get there before dark, because we don't know anybody. They said 'OK, you can come with us', and we were on the flight, for like the taxes, you pay the tax. It doesn't happen anymore. And then we ended up in London and met somebody on the street, and I asked them where the Roundhouse was, and of course we were in the wrong section and they said 'why?', and it just turned out it was somebody that was connected with the people I was connected with, and we found some little hotel and then the next day we were on the train to Paris for the show.

PON: In Mary Ann Staniszewski's book, *The Power of Display: A History of Installations at MOMA*, she talks about what she calls an art historical

amnesia towards the role played by artists in relation to exhibition design in the twenties, thirties and forties…

LW: Total, I mean the idea that the first real performances were Robert Whitman's beautiful performances on the ladder. There was nobody even in art school who knows anything about that. The teacher didn't know and they are documented somewhere here and there, in the Fluxus Codex probably.

PON: Do you think that this amnesia has impacted upon how we perceive say contemporary art curating now?

LW: No. I think it's made it a little bit more, it's made people, the participants, the artists themselves a little less tolerant of what is a basically bourgeois situation anyway, is that if little Johnny can speak three words of French and four words of German, they forget about the fact that every kid that's an immigrant in any country can speak four languages at nine, and doesn't know it's an accomplishment. So what they've taken is that anything that's home grown or anything that's from their scene that they went to school with or something is of course brand new, and the fact that it comes from something else, that's a bourgeois amnesia, it's not an art historical trick. 'Things fall through the cracks'. But in fact, if you've ever tried to keep your studio clean, very little falls through the cracks, most of it stays on the top of the surface or floor!

PON: A nice metaphor. Do you think that we need any more contemporary art biennials? That's a deliberately open ended question.

LW: I would say that I would be the last person to ask, because I don't know. There are people out there who would be looking for biennials, and looking for things like that, and I do know amongst acquaintances of mine, and friends who don't have that many showing opportunities, the few times there is a Norwich invitation or there is the show in Lødz in Poland, that it's proven a very positive thing and also for linking up artists who are not emerging, but artists who are not showing that much, with artists who are showing a lot. I think they're good. Maybe the biennial is a better thing, but the biennials have turned into art fairs now…people showing up with forty commissioners and everything else.

PON: What's your experience of biennials in terms of exhibiting as an artist?

LW: Oh, I was in Istanbul, I was in Sydney, and I have been in quite a few. I think it's fine, I like it, I mean there's other things that you basically, if you want to take it as a legitimate situation, you can show the whole world how right you are and how wrong everybody else is, without having to talk about it! You know, it's like a Benefit Concert. You can get up and show everybody that you really can deal with it better.

PON: You can do the gig.

LW: You can do the gig, yeah.

PON: One of the arguments against biennials is this kind of idea of the curator as a global flâneur or as a jetsetter who kind of basically jettisons into one culture.

LW: They can't be expected to pull it out, but the problem is that if they jettison into a culture, they don't seem to be able to avoid the, either for comfort level or for political reasons or for safety level, in some of the places they can't avoid getting only the dominant cultural artists. The artists that fit well into the dominant cultural structure, and some of them are good, this is the problem. And some of them are just predictable bourgeois representations of something, they become like the old joke of the Ukranian De Kooning or the Japanese Pollock or people being referred to as that.

PON: Do you have a comparative relationship with the biennials that you've done, I assume that they're pretty much the same?

LW: More or less, I'm, I've been a reasonably lucky artist, even when they didn't like what I was going to be doing. Maybe because I really developed and I grew up in the art world, once I made the decision to be an artist and I come from a working class family. Once you entered I was in that same position, so my relationship with other artists is such that it's familial and these structures don't usually bother me. And I'm an easy person, if I get in the same hotel as everybody else, everything's fine. Inside, you're a big person, inside you just slam your way around

and you do what you have to do.

PON: You do your thing, yeah.

LW: And try not to step on somebody else's neck.

PON: Do you think there is such a thing as good or bad curating, or do you think that we should have a vocabulary for establishing the criteria?

LW: We have it. Curators who accept the responsibility for each and every artist that they invite, are good curators. Curators who don't accept that responsibility are bad curators. Curators who don't proof read their catalogue are bad curators. Curators who do are good curators. I don't think it has to do with what your politics are, or what your standard is. It's a matter of, it's a job, and it's like being an artist, it's not an easy job, but it is a job, and you, as well as myself or anybody else can walk in front of a work of art, and know that that work of art is legitimate, even if you don't like it. And you can walk up on some things and see that they're not legitimate. Not the person, because again you can't tell. The most cynical person can make the most legitimate work of art. The most cynical doctor can save a kid's eyesight. That's not the point. The point is, what's there on the walls, what's there on the floor, what's there in the room. You can sense it. You miss it here and there, somebody fucks up, and they didn't get it. There are artists who I didn't get the first time I saw, because I don't like art that I don't understand right away, and maybe a year later it sort of occurred to me, oh that's what that bastard was trying to do, and you literally, if you're, you know, sometimes go out of my way at an opening, go over and say to he or she, 'by the way, that was quite OK', and they'd already heard of my upset, maybe because I feared what they had to say about me, and then we shake hands and then we move on, but it's not going to change their practice or change mine, unless it's an insight, and if it's an insight, I'll just incorporate it into my praxis, and vice-versa, I should hope.

PON: How did you feel or how did you respond initially when curator Jens Hoffmann invited you to be in that book, *The Next Documenta Should be curated by an Artist*?

LW: I thought it was silly, I thought it was just a book, and that's what I answered with, you know, the thing I just don't understand, why curators, why artists want to be curators - for health insurance? Can you think of any other reason? Health insurance is a big deal for an American, but still is health insurance enough to change your entire profession? My obligation as an artist is to my culture as a whole. My obligation as a curator would be to the institution, the artists and everything else, I would not be able to function as an artist, taking on other obligations.

PON: What if you see curating as being kind of embodied within your practice as an artist?

LW: I never, ever, I mean, it's so rare, if you look at any correspondences of mine, I don't even ask if I'm invited to a show, and it looks like an interesting show, I'll very rarely even ask who else is in it?

PON: So your responsibility is to yourself and the invitation?

LW: Yeah, exactly, and I will never refuse to show with anybody unless I see honest and truly that they're a fascist and there have been a few fascists in our world, sexist or racist, and that's about it, and I assure you that leaves about ninety nine point to a hundred percent of the world, of the art world is basically not sexist and not racist, and not - yeah they are a little kinky maybe, but that's not sexism. I can't see where you would have the right to say no. I only want to be in a room with those people who I've developed with - no I have friends that do that, and I'm in a lot of shows. I'm in a lot of shows where somebody is begging because they need you in the room, they need Robert Ryman in the room, they need this one in the room, they need that one in the room, it's for the life of me I don't know why, because basically the reason I will be in the room is I think they're pretty good, and I don't mean that to be modest or anything else, I mean, the reason I am saying yes to being in the room is that they were pretty good to begin with. What do they need all this back up for?

PON: I mean, there was also the argument made that ultimately what Jens Hoffmann was dealing with in that question and also with that publication, was that he was basically turning the question into his work, if you like,

into his perhaps curatorial work?

LW: Or what has become a form, a genre of post art school work, which is to pose a question to somebody as if this was, this is going back to the early 'Information' days, with Hans Haacke posing a question as if it was that. Hans is still doing it, I went and saw a show he was in now. But I don't really know if that constitutes the making of art. It might constitute the making of social, you know historian, it might constitute the making of cultural comprehension, but I'll be damned if I know whether that makes it an art object that somebody can use without a metaphor. George Bush being a pig, Tony Blair being a pig, both of them doing something no human being is allowed to do since we've discovered that royalty doesn't exist, to claim that they are consecrated by God, and therefore you must follow, has very little to do with art, it has to do with human lunacy. I mean that seriously, by the way.

PON: OK. To go back to the very first thing that you said, the idea of the curator as a mediator, and do you think that they can be a creative component, but in certain terms of distribution and a part to play in the production of artworks.

LW: Yeah, maybe it is, I don't know how to explain this. When Seth Siegelaub invited people to be in his thirty day show, some of them, it was like off the wall. They knew some of the people in it, so I'd get a phone call, John Chamberlain would get a phone call, somebody would get a phone call from some artist who really they'd never crossed paths with, they were in there, and yes it was a catalyst to doing - Duane Valentine did his salt works, it was the only time he did his salt works - I keep in touch with Duane, he is an old buddy, and he was one of the first people that was supportive of me in California. He along with Harry Bell and that whole scene was extremely gracious people, when we were in California. They let us show. They let us be who we were. Some of them even gave you beds and rooms and things like that, but the point was, the same as in Düsseldorf and in Cologne, in the sixties, they were not saying you can show because your work links to mine, they were saying you can show because the spirit of your work links with mine, and attempt to rationally understand where you are now. That's an answer to your question. That's as far as I can go. The creative thing of course sometimes a curator has put a creative spark in. Sometimes the bartender

does too! I am desperately serious. One of the reasons that I even have a rational life is that when I live and when somebody asks me what I do, I tell them what I do. And you'd be surprised that sometimes you get back real honest to goodness responses. I would say that the art world has not readapted its bureaucracy since the collapse of the previous bureaucracy in the early sixties. OK, we got the same problem with music. One rock and roll supplanted umpah and novelty songs, Tin Pan Alley, we have rock and roll, which is really rather OK, but that's all we have, and all of the work through factory records, all of the work through everybody else, has still ended up with rock and roll. That's what we, maybe we need another idea of how art is presented, and to take the role model of the computer is not the answer, because the internet does not serve that function.
OK, it was a try. I tried without a web. This something you don't, I began to develop a, not a distaste, but a disdain for it, because it doesn't fulfill its function.

PON: With the advent of the net there was such an expectation that wasn't lived up to…

LW: And to the muck that we're in as far as bureaucracy, that wasn't working any longer. That you had biennials and you had one artist, for whatever reason, with three commissioners putting it together, and yet artists sleeping on the floor of some factory somewhere, because they didn't have the right country. That begins to deny the thing, that gets back to that earlier comment, I didn't mean it as a funny toss off - as long as everybody gets the same hotel, then you're OK. The same equipment, then you got a biennial. Not when some people arrive with privileged situations and some people arrive with nothing. That's why I don't go and teach back at CCA. It is, I found, some of the Japanese students were sleeping in a barracks and being woken up at five in the morning with the factory, and the European students were getting grants from their country to go to this place that I was teaching in pro-bono. They were higher than the salary of employees that were working like seven days a week, twenty fours a day to take care of them. Then you step back and the biennials began to function like that.

PON: You've just done two shows in London, one at the Lisson Gallery, which is a commercial gallery and you're about to do a show at Tate

Modern. How do you see the relationship between you, the artist, and them, the curators in terms of the power structure?

LW: The only thing they determine is the configuration of the space that's afforded to you.

PON: Do you think that that's the strength of your work?

LW: I think the situation is far more generous than most artists realise, and there are times when the situation ceases to have any generosity, and then that's a constant vacation of a previous aesthetic and you just walk away. Thank you but no. They ask you to play an acoustic instrument in the middle of Piccadilly Circus, and you're not happy with that, then you don't do it. You don't blame them for asking you to do that, it's not even an insult, they had a creative idea. I don't have that; I really and truly do not have that many problems. I get a little fussy and picky on certain issues, but they mean something to me. Other than that, you say, you take the Queen's shilling and you do it.

PON: Have you heard about Jonathan Monk's show 'Continuous Project Altered Daily' at the ICA?

LW: At the ICA, yeah, I saw part of it. I don't know what the point was. I like Jonathan a lot. It reminds me of Terry Fox in the Basement and I'm not an artist who understands rearranging the collection of a museum as a work of art. I don't get it. Michael Asher moving the statues, I don't know why he's doing it again, it was really quite good when he first did it in Chicago. That's different. That's not rearranging the collection; it's not being a phony connoisseur about something that you really don't know that much about. What do you really know more than any other educated person? What do you really know about Van Eyck and this one and that one? What are you proving? You're proving an anecdotal history that you overheard. Sorry to be pretty attacking over this, but I really think that the getting down to the making of art is to realise that the making of art is to produce a mise en scène that produces ambience, and that's all that there is in art. Every sculpture, every painting, every installation produces a mise en scène, it produces an ambience. A logic structure, a way of looking at the world, and at the moment, and you know.

PON: So in some respects the relationship between the Jens Hoffmann and Jonathan Monk may be that question, may be that question of being asked to sing in the middle of Trafalgar Square?

LW: Yes, and also this problem of, as I said, asking somebody else, I think it's better to present somebody with something that they are enjoying to act with than present somebody with something that they have to name and place and figure out, but that's OK. Jonathan is a good enough artist. I had a show with Jonathan in Paris at Yvon Lambert's, both of us really sang, we did a videotape interview together and both of us sing well together. There's no problem. He's very serious, very intent and a really quite intelligent charming guy. That's not about Jonathan, it's certainly not about this thing about the curating. It is just what it is, somebody who decided to pose a question, and all art poses questions. Some art requires a personal response and some art requires a cultural response.

PON: Thank you.

END OF TAPE

Exhibitions Index:

1. 'Coalesce: Mingled-Mangled'
Venue: London Print Studio Gallery, London, England.
Dates: 14 April – 24 May, 2004.

List of Artists/ Works*

Background:
Kathrin Böhm, Jaime Gili.

Middle-ground:
Eduardo Padilha.

*All background and middle-ground works remained untitled.

'Coalesce'
Venue: Galeria Palma, Vilafranca, Spain.
Dates: 18 June – 18 July, 2004.

List of Artists/ Works*

Background:
Kathrin Böhm, Jaime Gili, Marta Marcé.

Middle-ground:
Clare Goodwin, Eduardo Padilha.

Foreground:
Paul O'Neill, Manuel Saiz.

*All background and middle-ground works remained untitled.

'Coalesce: With All Due Intent'
Venue: Model Arts and Niland Gallery, Sligo, Ireland.
Dates: 16 December – 22 January, 2004-05.

List of Artists/ Works*

Background:
Kathrin Böhm, Jaime Gili, Tod Hanson, Willie McKeown, Alexander Mir, Isabel Nolan, Lawrence Weiner, Jack B.Yeats.

Middle-ground:
Claire Goodwin, Eduardo Padilha.

Foreground:
Projections:
Sejla Kameric, *Dream House*, (2002), endless loop
Marko Raat, *For Aesthetic Reasons*, (1999), 28'

Monitors:
Ursula Biemann and Angela Saunders, *Europlex*, (2003), 20'
Petja Dimitrova, *Nationality*, (2003), 9'
Esra Ersen, *If you could speak Swedish*, (2001), 23'
Jakup Ferri, *Save me, Help me...,* (2003), 10'
Adla Isanovic, *Mi/Me*, (2002), 1' 30'"
Helmut and Johanna Kandl, *On the Island Bella Lella*, (2003), 30'
Tadej Pogacar and the PA.R.A.S.I.T.E. Museum of Contemporary Art, *CODE: RED*, (2001), 29'.

*All background and middle-ground works remained untitled.

'Coalesce: The Remix'
Venue: Redux, London, England.
Dates: 13 May – 6 June, 2005.

List of Artists/ Works*

Background:
Kathrin Böhm, Jaime Gili, Lothar Götz, Tod Hanson.

Middle-ground:
Claire Goodwin, Eduardo Padilha.

Foreground:
13 May, Curated by Paul O'Neill.
Screening of Artist's Projections took place on 13 May: Anthony Gross, Oriana Fox, Cyril Lepetit, Stefan Nilolaev, Harold Offeh, Mark Orange, Marko Raat.

14 May – 20 May, Curated by Sarah Pierce.
Conversations were recorded by Pierce throughout 14 May – 20 May with: Jason Coburn, Jeremiah Day, Peter Lewis, Elizabeth Price, Craig Smith, Maria Fusco.

Resulting Publication:
Pierce, Sarah, ed., *Metropolitan Complex Paper No.12,* (Dublin & London, The Metropolitan Complex & Redux & temporarycontemporary, 2006), edition of 40.

21 – 27 May, Curated by Dave Beech and Mark Hutchinson.
Resulting Publication:
Beech, Dave and Hutchinson, Mark, eds, *The First Condition of Freedom of the Press is that it is not a Business Activity*, The First Condition issue No. 4, (London, Redux, 2007).

29 – 3 June, Curated by temporarycontemporary.
29 May: Lorin Davies, Cyril Lepetit, Caroline McCarthy, Lindsay Seers, Tai Shani

30 May: Sarah Baker, Monica Biagioli, Monika Oechsler, Paul O'Neill, Luke Oxley
31 May: Diann Bauer, Ian Dawson, Marcus Harvey, Denise Kum, Mark Pearson, Mark Titchner
3 June: Leesa and Nicole Abahuni with Scott Hewitt.

*For this exhibition all background, middle-ground and foreground works remained untitled. The background and middle-ground remained on exhibition for the duration of the exhibition run.

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2. 'TONIGHT'

Venue: Studio Voltaire, London, England.
Dates: 16 April – 30 May, 2004.

List of Artists/ Works*

Background:
Kathrin Böhm, Liam Gillick.

Middle-ground:
Anthony Gross, *Flexible Curatorial Play Unit,* (2004).

Foreground:
Georgina Batty, Simon Bedwell, Dave Beech, Ólöf Björnsdóttir, David Blamey, Kathrin Böhm, Ian Breakwell, Pavel Büchler, Gerard Byrne, Adam Chodzko, Declan Clarke, Cornford & Cross, Jeremy Deadman, Mark Dickenson, Jeanette Doyle, Markus Eisenmann, Matt Franks, Babak Ghazi, Liam Gillick, Andrew Grassie, Brian Griffiths, Anthony Gross, Matthew Higgs, Mark Hutchinson, Gareth Jones, Janice Kerbel, Brighid Lowe, Frank Lüsing, Caroline McCarthy, Ronan McCrea, Goshka Macuga, Aleksandra Mir, Jonathan Monk, Suzanne Mooney, Hayley Newman, Stefan Nikolaev, Harold Offeh, Mark Pearson, Elizabeth Price, Lindsay Seers, DJ Simpson, Bob and Roberta Smith, Mark Titchner, Mungo Thomson, Markus Vater, Christopher Warmington, Lawrence Weiner, Annie Whiles, Ian Whittlesea, Michael Wilkinson.

*For this exhibition all background, and foreground works remained untitled.

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3. 'La La Land'

Venue: Project, Dublin, Ireland.
Dates: 19 May – 02 July, 2005.

List of Artists/ Works*

Gallery:
David Blamey, *Celestial Notice Boards*, (2005).
Kathrin Böhm, *millions and millions*, (2001-05).

Jaime Gili, *Tipos Móviles,* (2005), (with posters by Kathrin Böhm, Neil Chapman, Simon Faithfull, Claire Goodwin, Mustafa Hulusi, Abigail Hunt, Inventory, Neil McIvor, Marta Marcé, Kieren Reed, Bob and Roberta Smith, Tomoko Takahashi, Mark Titchner, and Ana Laura López de la Torre).
Liam Gillick, *Discussion Island Preparation Zone*, (2005).
Anthony Gross, *Crowd Roar Ascending*, (2005).
Ronan McCrea, *Appropriate Measures II*, (1995-2005).

Gallery Events:
B + B, *Workshop*, (2005).
Amy Plant and Jeanne van Heeswijk, *Valley Vibes Archive*, (2005).

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4. 'General Idea: Selected Retropsective'

Venue: Project, Dublin, Ireland.
Dates: 27 January – 11 March, 2006.

List of Artists/ Works

Gallery:
Background:
General Idea, *AIDS Wallpaper*, (1989/2006).

Middle-ground:
Anthony Gross, *General Idea Archive Display Structure*, (2006).

Foreground:
General Idea, *General Idea Archive*, (1970-89), contained:
A selection of archival material from General Idea projects from 1970 to 1978 including: *What Happened*, (1970); *Light On*, (1971/72); *Luxon V.B.*, (1973/75); *V.B. Gowns,* (1975/77); *The 1984 Miss General Idea Pavillion*, (1968/78). The complete set of twenty-six issues of *FILE Megazine*, (1972/89) and excerpts of *General Idea's Borderline Cases*, taken from the 'IFEL issue' of *FILE Megazine*, (1973).
Three video works:
General Idea, *Hot Property*, (1978/80), 26'
General Idea, *Pilot*, (1977), 29'
General Idea, *Shut The Fuck Up*, (1985), 14'.

Foyer:
Luxon V.B., (1973/2006), site-specific reconstruction of the original work from 1973.
Luxon Video, (1973/74), endless loop of unseen video footage with ambient sound, incomplete work.

General Idea, *Art Metropole*, Toronto, (1973-06). A selection of material from Art Metropole, an artist -run centre dedicated to publishing and distributing books and multiples by artists
Cabinet 1: Articles for sale included General Idea catalogues, artist's books and multiples

Not for Sale - Cabinet 2: General selection of publications and ephemera from the Art Metropole Archive

Billboard on Outside of Project Building:
AA Bronson, *Felix, June 5, 1994*, (1994/99).

Poster:
Mondo Cane Kama Sutra, (1983-2001).
Reproduction of poster from 1983, in edition of 2000 mailed to Project's mailing list.